

Concepts for the Japantown Community Plan

Prepared for the Japantown Planning
Preservation and Development Task Force

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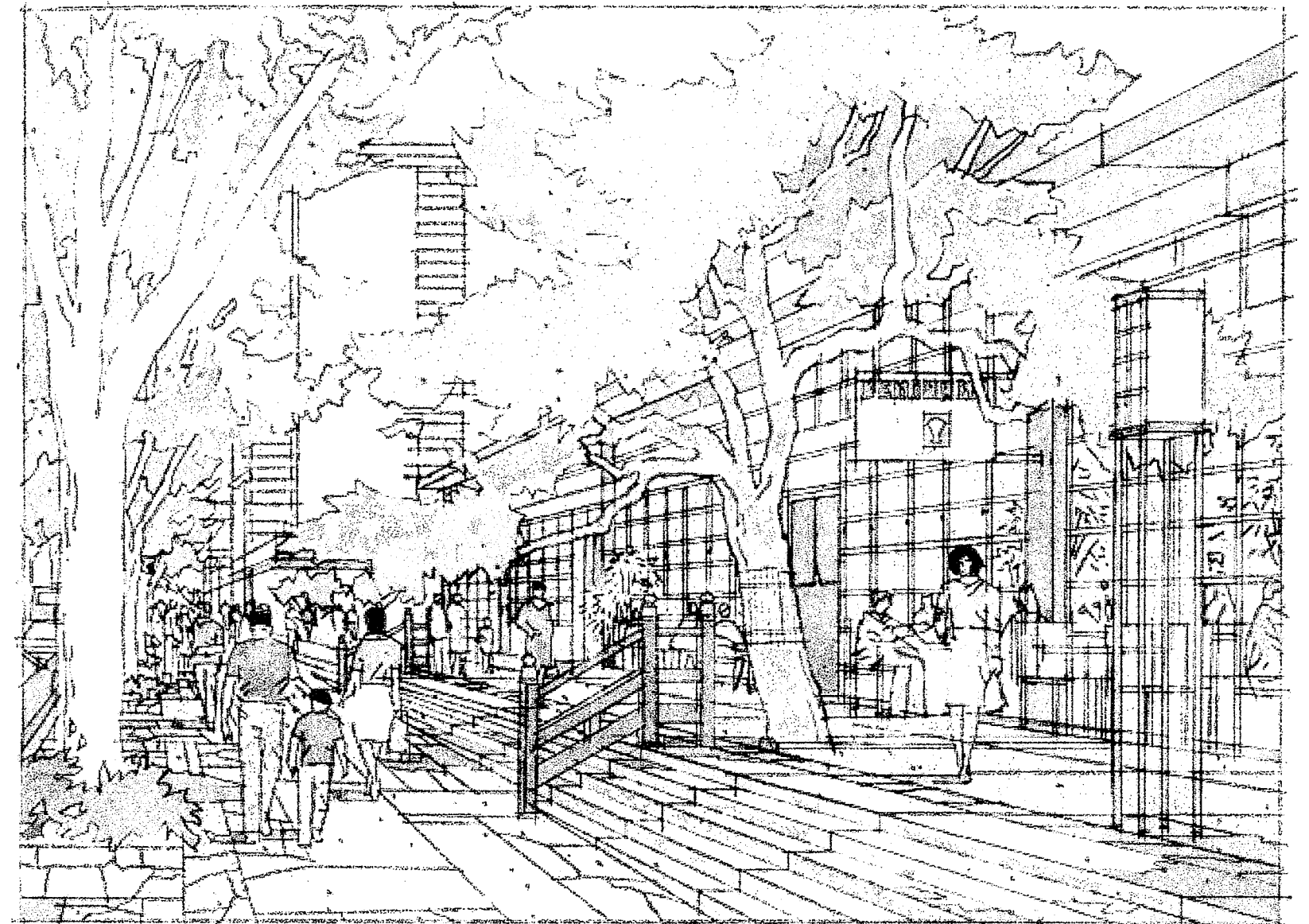
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San Francisco's Japantown is one of only three remaining in the United States. Preserving and revitalizing Japantown is essential as a manifestation of Japanese American history, a celebration of current cultural expression and an inspiration to future generations about Japanese American cultural heritage. Although dispersed throughout the region, San Francisco's Japanese American community has demonstrated an exceptional capacity to unite in pursuit of their common goal of preserving Japantown.

Assuring the permanence of a setting for Japanese American culture and the many associated community-based organizations that reside in the neighborhood is sufficient reason alone for preserving and protecting Japantown. In addition, the future of Japantown should be secured in order to:

- Continue to provide unique goods and services to the community and the city
- Provide a unique visitor destination for city residents and tourists
- Enhance the cultural mosaic that makes San Francisco such a great city

It is to this future that the concepts described in this report are dedicated.

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I. Introduction

This report summarizes economic and urban design programs and concepts for consideration by the community as key elements of the Japantown Community Plan—an economic and physical planning strategy designed to ensure the long-term vitality of the Japantown area in San Francisco. The report summarizes the second phase of a three-part planning process that will ultimately lead to the full Community Plan.

The first phase, completed in October 1999 under the direction of the Japantown Planning, Preservation and Development Task Force (JPPDTF), included extensive community outreach and analysis of existing physical conditions in the neighborhood. The result of Phase 1 was the adoption by the JPPDTF of specific goals and objectives for the future of the neighborhood.

This phase (Phase 2) advances the preparation of the Community Plan. While the work of Phase 2 does not represent the Japantown Community Plan in its entirety, it does include analysis and a range of priority economic programs and urban design concepts that can serve as the basis for completion of the Japantown Community Plan in Phase 3. The final Japantown Community Plan will also include further elaboration of community development and organizing strategies and programs for youth and families which will be prepared by the community at a later date. In general, the economic and urban design concepts summarized in this report include the following:

1. A broad summary of strategies that can be employed to address the goals and objectives identified by the community in Phase 1.
2. Definition of priority economic action programs and projects that will help stabilize and revitalize the economic, social and physical environment of Japantown. Action should begin on these programs and projects now.
3. Preliminary definition of a framework of urban design elements that can guide the

long range improvement of the Japantown neighborhood environment in conjunction with economic programs and projects.

Definition of the Study Area

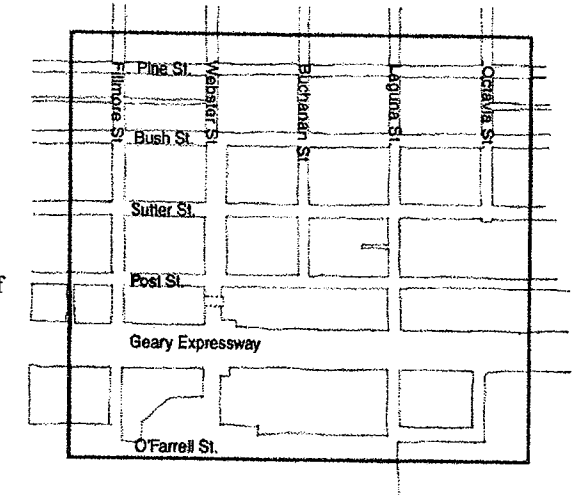
The boundaries of the study area as defined by the JPPDTF are illustrated in Exhibit 1. It includes an area of approximately .25 square mile with a boundary one half block beyond Pine on the north, O'Farrell Street on the south, one half block east of Octavia, and one half block west of Fillmore. The area encompasses Japantown's core commercial district, residential neighborhoods, and important cultural institutions.

Purpose of the Phase 2 Study

In addition to the definition of goals during the first phase of the planning process, an extensive list of objectives related to the goals was defined. Not all of these can be accomplished in the short-term. Therefore, one of the primary purposes of this second phase of study is to identify key issues and opportunities (economic, social, and physical) derived from the goals and objectives and to synthesize them into a set of strategic actions that:

- Can be pursued immediately.
- Provide the greatest impact for the preservation and enhancement of Japantown.
- In their combined effect, address as many of the identified needs, goals and objectives as possible.
- Provide a long-term framework for future action.

Exhibit 1



Organization of this Report

The report is divided into the following five sections:

Section I: Introduces the study area and purpose of the study.

Section II: Summarizes the vision and goals for Japantown articulated by the JPPDTF.

Section III: Discusses concepts and strategies for economic development, urban design and community organizing.

Section IV: Describes priority community development programs in depth.

Section V: Detailed Summary of Japantown Community Goals, Objectives and Strategies.

Appendices: A. Research on Japanese Anchor Retailers

B. Japantown Community Plan Phase 2 Participants

II. The Vision for Japantown

Vision

In the first phase of the Japantown community planning process, the Task Force defined the following broad vision for the future of Japantown:

The Vision of this Community Plan is to provide ideas and strategies to preserve and develop Japantown as a viable neighborhood by revitalizing its commercial and cultural district into a local, statewide, national, and international resource. We envision strengthening the ethnic diversity of San Francisco by bringing together the culture and history of the Nikkei community into the Japantown center for all to share, and to create an atmosphere of safety, beauty, and prosperity for the residents, organizations, and businesses all residing in the neighborhood for now and in the future.

Goals

As part of the first phase of study, stakeholders in the community expressed a broad range of needs and desires. Three goals were established. During this current phase of the planning study, a fourth goal was adopted by the Task Force to encompass objectives related more directly to Japantown's physical environment. The four goals guiding development of the Community Plan are:

- Goal 1: Develop Japantown as an historical center, a cultural capital and a community center for people of Japanese ancestry in America.
- Goal 2: Revitalize Japantown as a thriving commercial and retail district.
- Goal 3: Preserve and expand Japantown as a neighborhood of residents, community-based organizations and institutions and neighborhood services.
- Goal 4: Improve Japantown's physical environment so that it contributes to the cultural, economic and neighborhood vitality and diversity.

Realizing the Vision

Realizing the vision will require the successful implementation of a coordinated set of economic development and physical planning strategies for the neighborhood as a whole and for specific areas within it. The first step, however, will require recognition and understanding by the various residents, business owners, and other stakeholders in the neighborhood of the economic and social realities facing Japantown.

The Role of Japantown: neighborhood vs. community

San Francisco's Japantown, similar to Japantowns throughout the U.S., emerged as a direct response to historical economic and social exclusion. Community solidarity and enterprise provided new economic and social opportunities for Japanese Americans to retain their cultural heritage while prospering.

While at one time Japantown was the center of a highly concentrated Japanese-American residential population in San Francisco, it no longer plays that role and is unlikely to do so in the future. Historical events, including the internment of Japanese Americans and their relocation resulting from urban renewal activities, the assimilation of Japanese Americans into the larger culture, and changing immigration patterns have resulted in a much more dispersed community. Today, most Japanese Americans in the Bay Area do not desire to live in Japantown, given the myriad alternative neighborhood choices offered elsewhere in the region. As a result, there is not a sufficient density of Japanese American residents in Japantown to support the high concentration of community-based institutions and businesses in the area. Thus, Japantown cannot be viewed as a typical neighborhood center where goods, services, cultural and educational resources are supported primarily by the surrounding neighborhood.

Japantown does, however, continue to play an important role to many Japanese Americans as a place to visit for cultural, educational, commercial and entertainment reasons. While most of these Japanese American visitors do not live in the neighborhood, they are members of a strong regional *community* with deep roots in the area.

Ensuring Japantown's long-term sustainability requires acknowledging the reality that the neighborhood alone can no longer support Japantown and its institutions. The survival of Japantown will require implementation of eco-

nomic and community development strategies that create benefits for the neighborhood and the regional Japanese American community.

The following principles, which have emerged from this phase of planning, are considered key to making Japantown the local, statewide, national, and international resource envisioned by the Task Force:

- **Reinforce the physical identity of Japantown** as a special district in the city. This includes expression of the current role of Japantown and recognizes that perhaps the most important key to neighborhood survival is attracting people to enjoy and participate in Japantown's unique cultural experiences. The physical identity and environment must be attractive to children, youth, adults and seniors alike; each of these groups are integral to Japanese American identity.
- **Identify and support one or more "economic engines"** that are compatible with the desired character of the area, helping to financially support Japantown's cultural and educational institutions and minimize the need for outside public subsidy. This includes identifying methods for increased revenue generation on behalf of the community through development partnerships and other mechanisms.
- **Establish programs promoting the attraction and retention of businesses** that provide goods, services and entertainment appropriate to visitor and neighborhood needs and fit the new demographic realities of the Japantown community.

- **Define a framework for the improvement of the physical environment of Japantown** that reflects activities within the community's varying districts. Like many neighborhoods in San Francisco, Japantown is similar to a small town or "city within a city." It has a "main street", major public gathering places, areas with a high concentration of community cultural facilities, and quiet residential districts. Conservation, enhancement, and renovation actions in both the public and private realms are needed and should be appropriate to the role and character of these districts.
- **Implement strategies** that will attract children, youth, families and young adults to Japantown.

Physical Planning and Urban Design Strategies for San Francisco Japantown

BMS Design Group
for
The Japantown Planning, Preservation and Development Task Force

Funded by The San Francisco Redevelopment Agency and
The Metropolitan Transportation Commission Transportation for Livable Communities
July 2001

Physical Planning and Urban Design Strategies

There are three elements of the planning and urban design strategy for Japantown:

1. The Urban Framework
2. Correct Planning and Design Errors of the Past
3. Establish a Unique Image for Japantown

The Urban Framework

A strong organizing framework is essential to guide future development throughout the Japantown area. A framework establishes the overall pattern and organization of land uses, the structure of vehicular and pedestrian circulation and the image of the community. This in turn helps guide future public and private decisions and investments. A long-term framework to guide urban development of Japantown is particularly critical at this time. Since the end of World War II and the establishment of the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, the development of Japantown has been guided by the plans and policies established for redevelopment areas A-1 (Japan Center) and A-2 (Western Addition). Those plans and policies are now inadequate because:

- Redevelopment Area A-1 recently has been closed by the Redevelopment Agency. As a result, development guidance in this area will be controlled primarily by general policies of the San Francisco Department of City Planning. No existing specific detailed plans or policies pertain to the Japantown area, unlike other special districts of the City.
- Redevelopment Area A-2 will be closed in 2009 with the same result as A-1. Many of the planning and design principles that were put in place to guide the redevelopment of Japantown in the past are not desirable or sustainable today. A new framework to guide future development is therefore required.

Existing Urban Pattern

Japantown's current urban pattern or framework evolved as the result of two primary factors:

- The historic urban grid of San Francisco, which shaped growth of the City from its earliest years
- The redevelopment plans of the 1950's and 1960's which reshaped this historic pattern, with the intention of "improving" and modernizing the blight perceived to pervade the area.

The Japantown area was like other portions of the city: a part of the extensive grid, which hosted the numerous diverse neighborhoods that comprised San Francisco. The grid promoted easy access between areas. It also was extremely flexible and adaptable to a variety of building types and scales. In the 1950's and 60's however, redevelopment policy promoted assemblage of "superblocks" which were cleared and reconstructed with modern residential, office and retail uses. In many places buildings were built considerably higher than their surrounding neighbors, and streets were closed to allow parcel assemblage. The pattern was applied to the Japantown area, and resulted in the construction of the Japan Center, which spanned three standard blocks, and which included a major retail mall, hotel, underground parking, and public plaza. These buildings were very modern in appearance typical of their era. They also did little to promote an active civic life, and in fact provided numerous blank walls to the street. Today as a consequence of these factors, the framework of Japantown does not promote an active, vital neighborhood with a sense of human interaction and activity as well as it could. In addition the image of Japantown is a mix of relatively bland, modern architecture juxtaposed with more intimately scaled buildings, some of which have Japanese architectural references. Further compounding the lack of identifiable image for Japantown is the lack of unique streetscape except in a few areas, such as the Buchanan Mall. The district as a whole is poorly defined, with unclear edges, boundaries, and gateways. This lack of a distinctive image has been identified as a critical problem in the area. Two objectives defined by the previous work of the JPPDTF recognize the need for a more clear urban framework as follows:

- 4.1: Develop a cohesive urban design vision for Japantown by highlighting its center and better defining its edges so that the place is welcoming to people and visually unique to its surroundings.*
- 4.2: Improve and upgrade the physical appearance of Japantown's commercial district to ensure that people will be attracted to the businesses, resulting in continued financial viability of Japantown.*

As a first stage in defining a framework for Japantown, background analysis was undertaken. Two key parts of that analysis were:

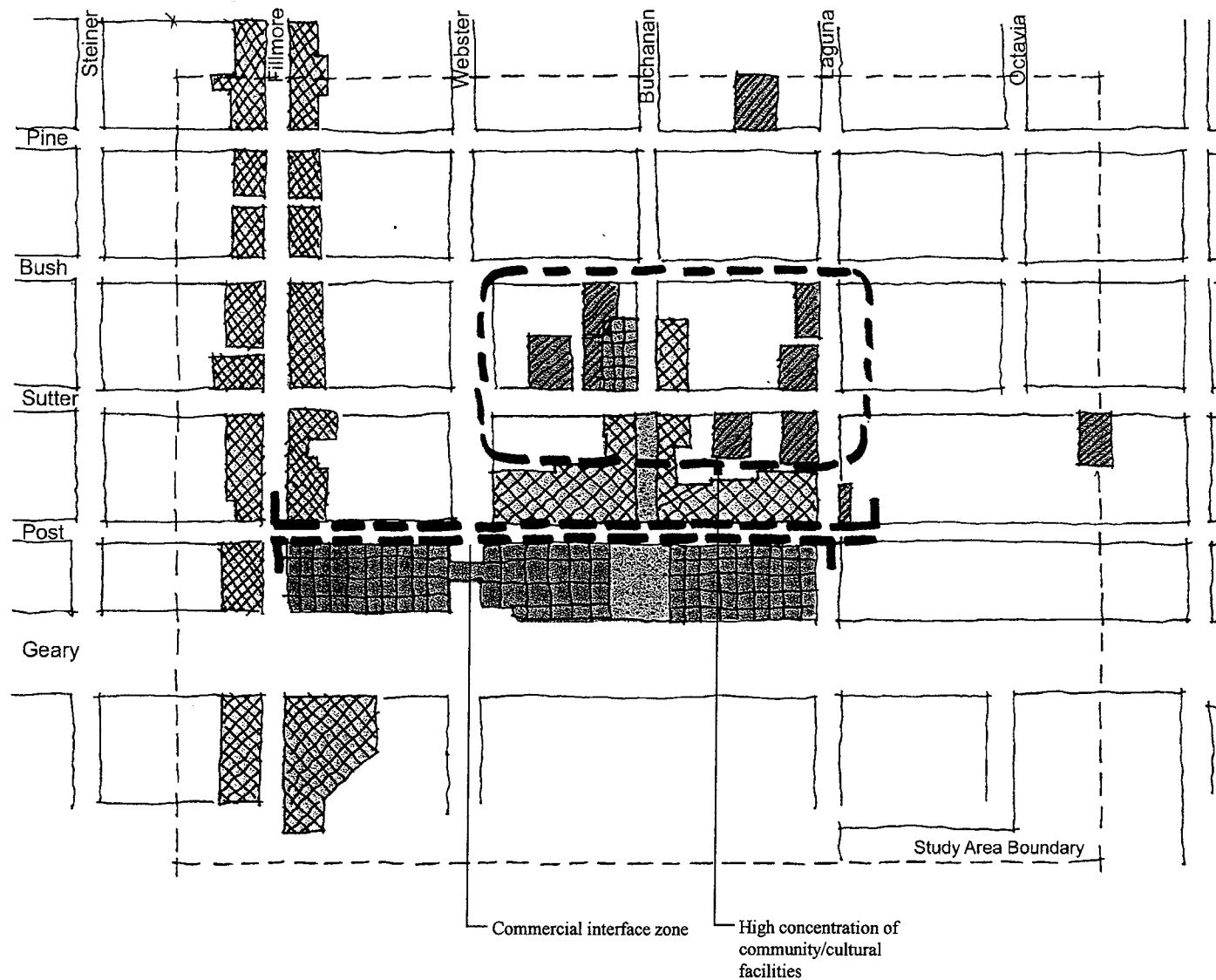
- Analysis of existing land use patterns
- Analysis of existing urban framework

Existing Land Use Patterns

During Phase 1, the JPPDTF and their consultants did extensive mapping of existing conditions throughout the Japantown area. Property ownership, land uses, zoning districts, age of structures, and special community features were mapped. Based on this land use analysis and observations and findings since then, generalized land use patterns in key categories were identified. Exhibit 6 illustrates in sketch form the land use patterns that are relevant to defining a general urban framework. Among the key observations:

- Regional commercial uses are generally located between Post Street and Geary Boulevard in the Japan Center. These are mostly retail, restaurant and hotel uses that serve as a destination and attraction for visitors and tourists from a wide geographic area. These uses, which occupy what was previously three city blocks, now constitute a “superblock” shopping center, served by a large parking structure which lies under most of the superblock. The retail uses are arranged in a traditional suburban mall configuration, with access from the interior and few windows or other openings to the surrounding neighborhood.
- Neighborhood commercial uses are generally located along the north side of Post Street, along Buchanan Mall and along Fillmore Street. These uses serve surrounding residential neighborhoods, and include stores selling Japanese groceries, hardware, clothing, videos, restaurants, and other amenities and services.
- There is a high concentration of community, educational and cultural organizations in the four blocks bounded by Webster, Laguna, Post and Bush. Sutter Street, between Webster and Laguna, is the heart of this area.
- A commercial interface zone between regional commercial and neighborhood commercial exists along Post Street. This is where there is a blending of visitor and local serving uses.
- Generally land use patterns fall into two categories:
 - A distinct “core” of predominantly non-residential uses bounded by Sutter/Geary/ Laguna/Webster. This core contains regional and neighborhood retail, restaurants and cultural and educational facilities.
 - A surrounding ring of residential areas outside of this core, generally located north of Bush, south of Geary, east of Laguna and west of Webster.
- There is not a significant amount of open space or public gathering areas in the district. The two key spaces include the Peace Plaza between Geary and Post, and the Buchanan Mall between Post and Sutter.
- There is no soft, naturalistic open space or children’s play areas in public parks.

Exhibit 6
Existing Land Use Patterns



Legend

-  Neighborhood Commercial
-  Regional Commercial
-  Community/Cultural Uses
-  Community Open Space and Meeting Areas



Existing Urban Framework

Exhibit 7 illustrates a sketch analysis of the existing urban framework. A number of key points emerge from this analysis:

- Three distinct subdistricts can be identified in the area: 1) the Japantown core; 2) the upper Fillmore, an active neighborhood street with restaurants and bars, clothing and home furnishings and other services, and 3) the Lower Fillmore (or Jazz District), which lies across Geary, and which is currently undergoing renovation as a destination entertainment district.
- The core of Japantown and the uses which generate the highest intensity of pedestrian activity lie in the center of the study area around Post Street. This is the area, which is most closely identified as Japantown to visitors.
- Geary Expressway acts as a barrier between Japantown and surrounding neighborhoods, including the St. Francis Square residential area and the Lower Fillmore district. The width of the street and the volume and speed of traffic are formidable barriers to pedestrians trying to cross and effectively isolates Japantown from its neighbors to the south.
- There is only one clear Japantown gateway, or marker that indicates an entrance to the district. This lies at the north end of the Buchanan Mall and is designed as a modern interpretation of a *torii* (gate). Buchanan is not, however, the primary path of entry for most visitors to the area. The major entry corridors in the district, Post, Sutter, Webster, and Buchanan (from the south), do not present an identifiable image of Japantown and do not include any gateway treatment or announcement.
- The major focal point of the district, the Peace Plaza, which has recently been renovated, is somewhat hidden from view with the exception of the Peace Pagoda. A clear idea of the character of the plaza and how to enter it is particularly difficult from Geary.
- The edges of the Japantown core are not clear and do not present a memorable image to the surrounding community and visitor.

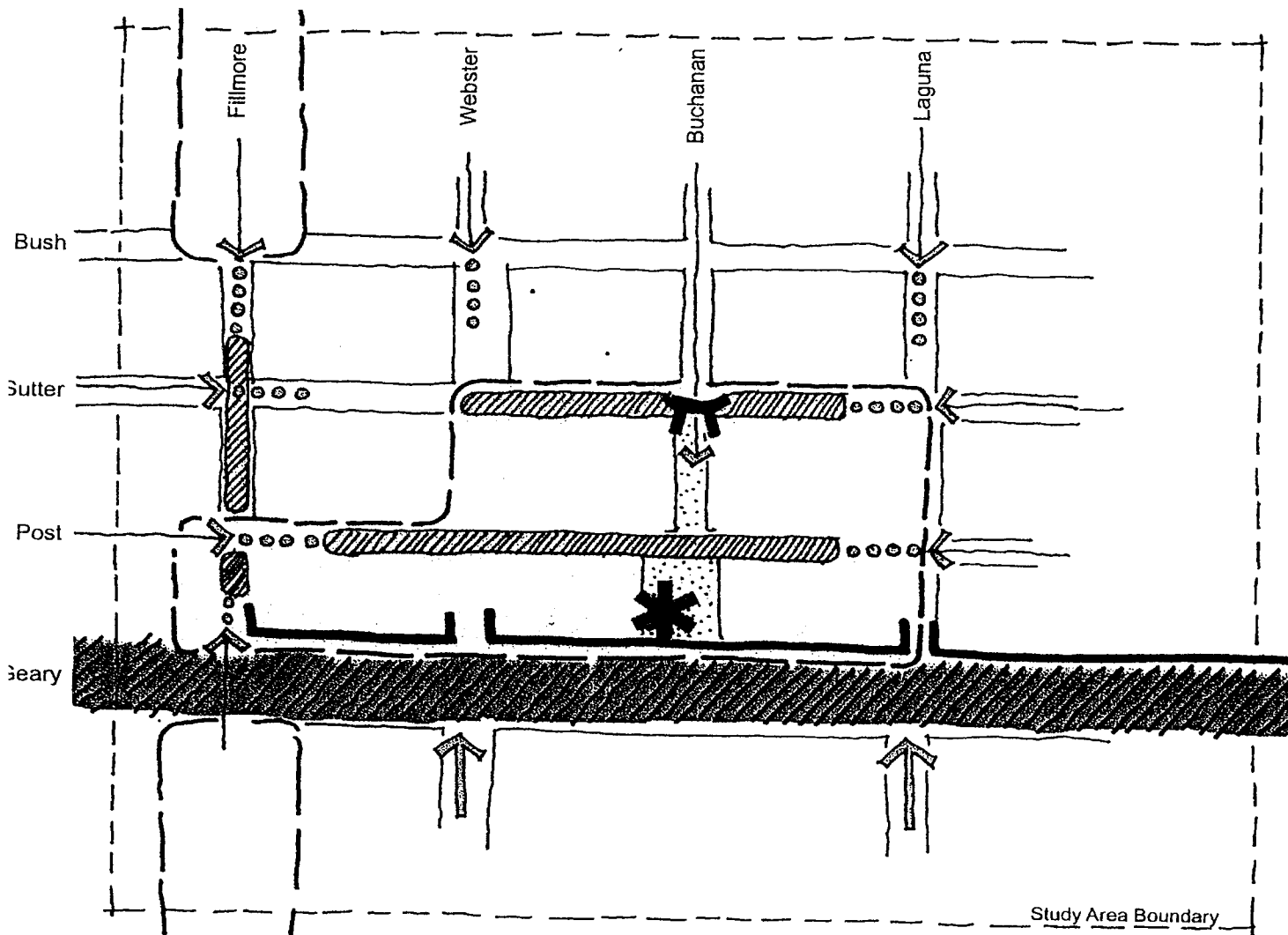


Exhibit 7

Analysis of Existing Urban Framework

Legend



Existing Community Gateways



Focal Point



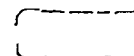
Potential Community Image Corridors



Barriers



Community Entry Corridors



Definable Subdistricts

Redefining the Urban Framework

As discussed earlier, in order to guide future planning and development decisions, a clear framework needs to be articulated for Japantown. The framework provides the reference for the various plans and programs and will help guide specific decisions on future projects. Exhibit 8 illustrates a proposed framework concept to guide the future of Japantown. This framework identifies key zones and their roles within the larger areas. It also identifies locations for key features, edges, gateways and the like, and identifies appropriate roles for major circulation elements. Within the Japantown core, three major zones are identified corresponding to prevailing land uses and activities as illustrated previously in Exhibit 6, Existing Land Use Patterns. These include:

- **Commercial core.** This area already is the place for the majority of retail businesses in Japantown. Japan Center and Post Street host a variety of restaurants, retail businesses and services used by the Japanese American community as well as other San Franciscans and visitors.
- **Community/cultural core.** The area surrounding Sutter Street is the site of many of Japantown's community service and cultural organizations. Although it is not an area of high pedestrian traffic, it is intensively used by local Japanese American residents, and could be more of a destination for visitors.
- **Community Crossroads.** The Buchanan Mall and Peace Plaza lie at the center of Japantown and in many ways constitute the symbolic heart of the community. This area also attracts visitors who are drawn to the mall and the Japanese style of the installations in the Peace Plaza. This area also has the potential to be even more of a meeting place and crossroads for the variety of communities who have Japantown as a destination.

Streets serving Japantown can be defined as Community Framing streets or Community Access streets. The Japantown core is defined on three sides by Community Framing Streets, which include Fillmore on the west, Laguna on the east and Bush on the north. Although relatively undistinguished today, these streets should be redesigned to:

- Signal the edges and boundary of Japantown through a change in streetscape design elements,
- Provide orientation and wayfinding information to destinations in the core,
- Be expressive of the unique character of Japantown and provide a distinctive image to passing motorists, transit riders and pedestrians through streetscape, signage, and other elements.

Although the Geary Expressway does frame the Japantown core on the south, it should not be designed with a character that uniquely references Japantown, since it is a city-wide great street and traverses many neighborhoods and districts. However, the presence of Japantown should be announced more clearly from the Geary Expressway to passersby (other modifications to Geary are discussed elsewhere in this report.)

Community Access Corridors provide vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle access to Japantown. There are two types of Community Access Corridors:

- Primary access corridors lead directly to the core area of Japantown as well as to the Community Crossroads. These include Post, Sutter and Buchanan.
- Secondary access corridors provide more tangential access to the Japantown core. Webster Street is a secondary access corridor.

A hierarchy of gateways to the Japantown core should be provided on all primary and secondary community access corridors. The most important of these gateways to Japantown should be provided on the east and west ends of Post Street (at Laguna and Fillmore) signifying Post Street's role as the commercial "Main Street" of the neighborhood.

Exhibit 9 illustrates a detailed concept for the location of gateways and streetscape along Fillmore Street, which serves as an important "facade" to the outside world for Japantown.

Exhibit 10 illustrates a concept for the major gateway to Japantown at Post and Fillmore.

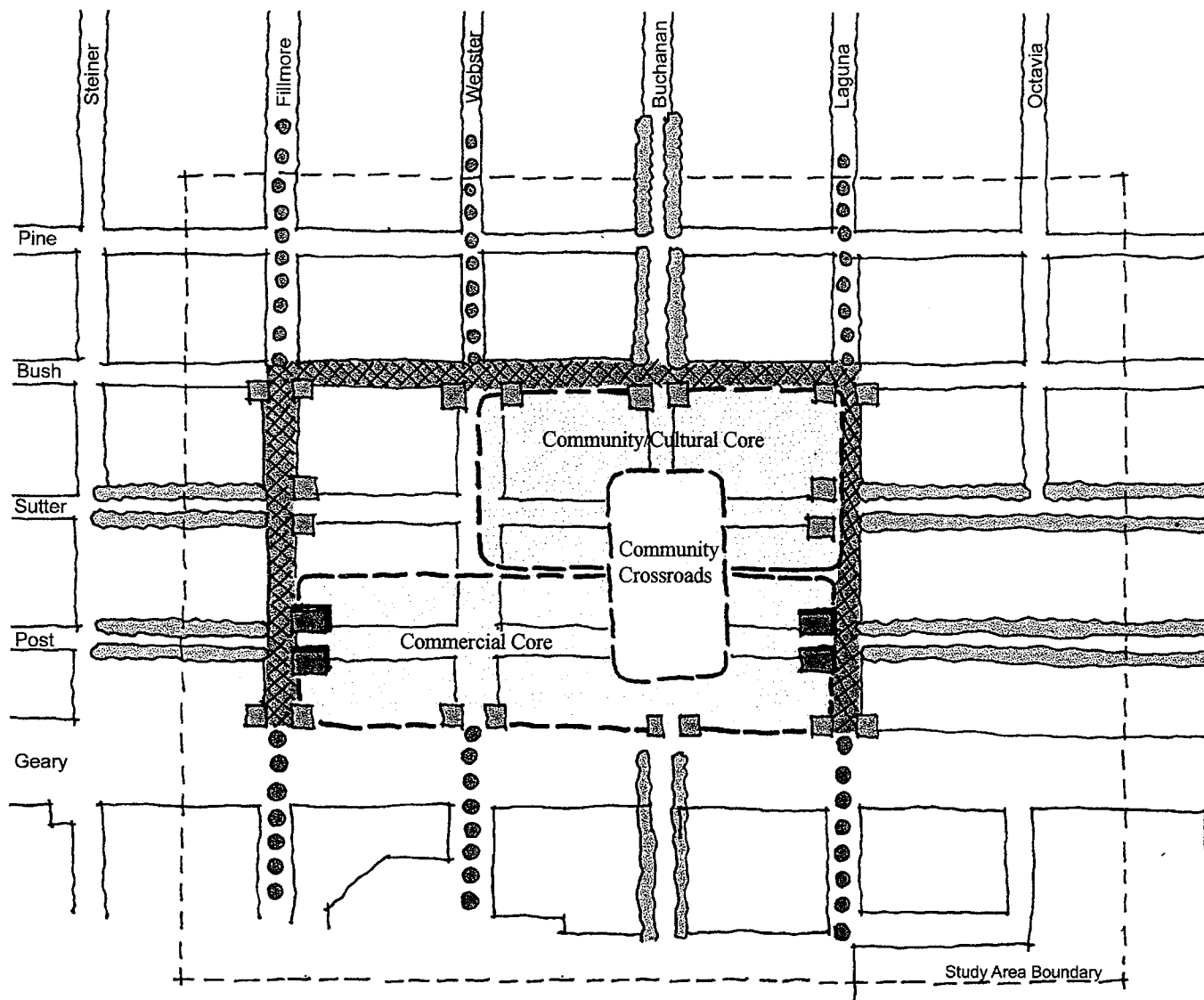







Exhibit 8
Urban Framework

Task Force Objective 4.1

Develop a cohesive urban design vision for Japantown by highlighting its center and better defining its edges to make it welcoming and visually unique to its surroundings.

Legend

-  Primary Community Access Corridors
-  Secondary Community Access Corridors
-  Community Framing Streets
-  Gateways to the Commercial Core
-  Minor Gateways



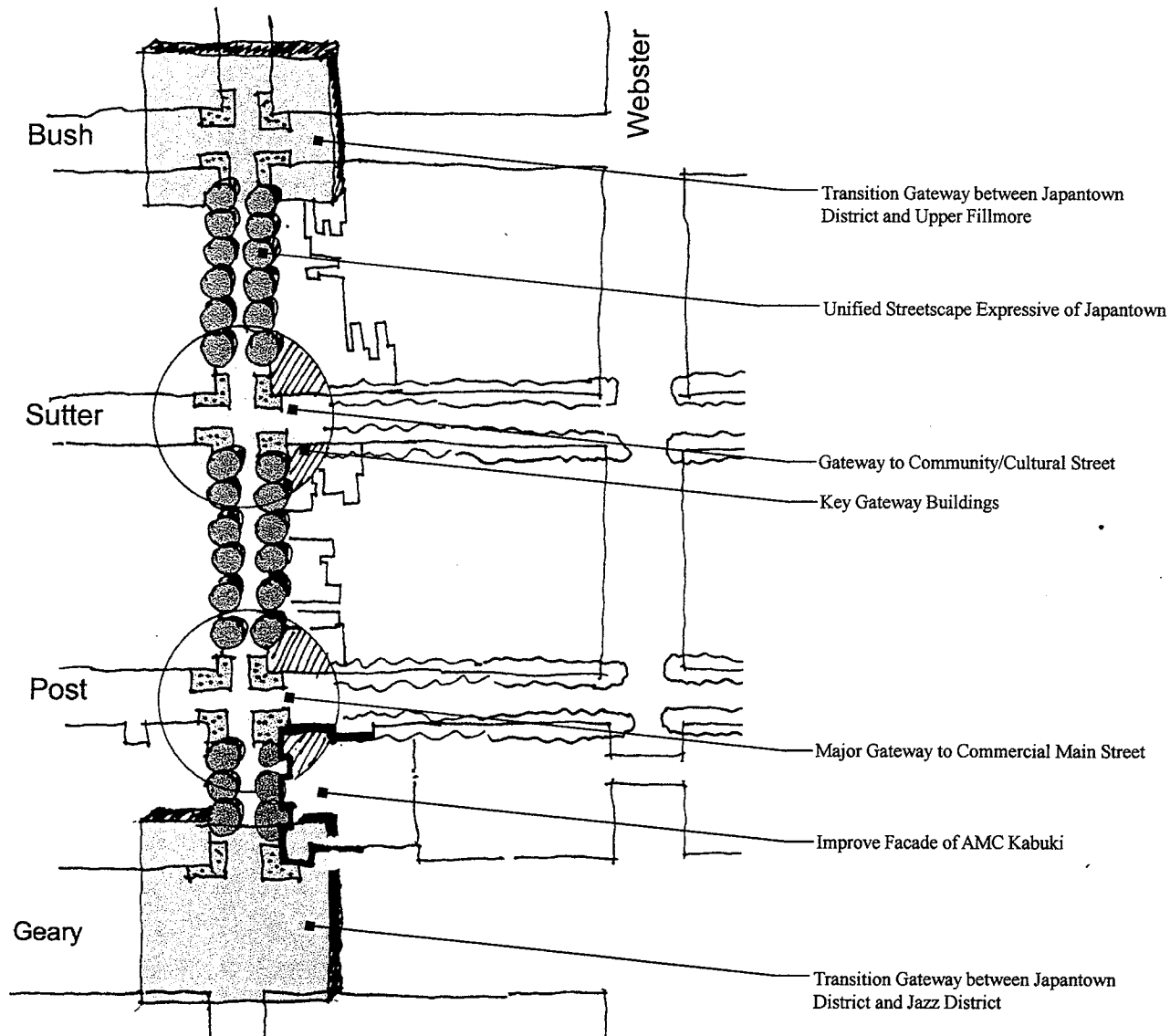


Exhibit 9

Fillmore Street

Task Force Objective 4.2.4

Give Japantown a positive face along Fillmore Street.



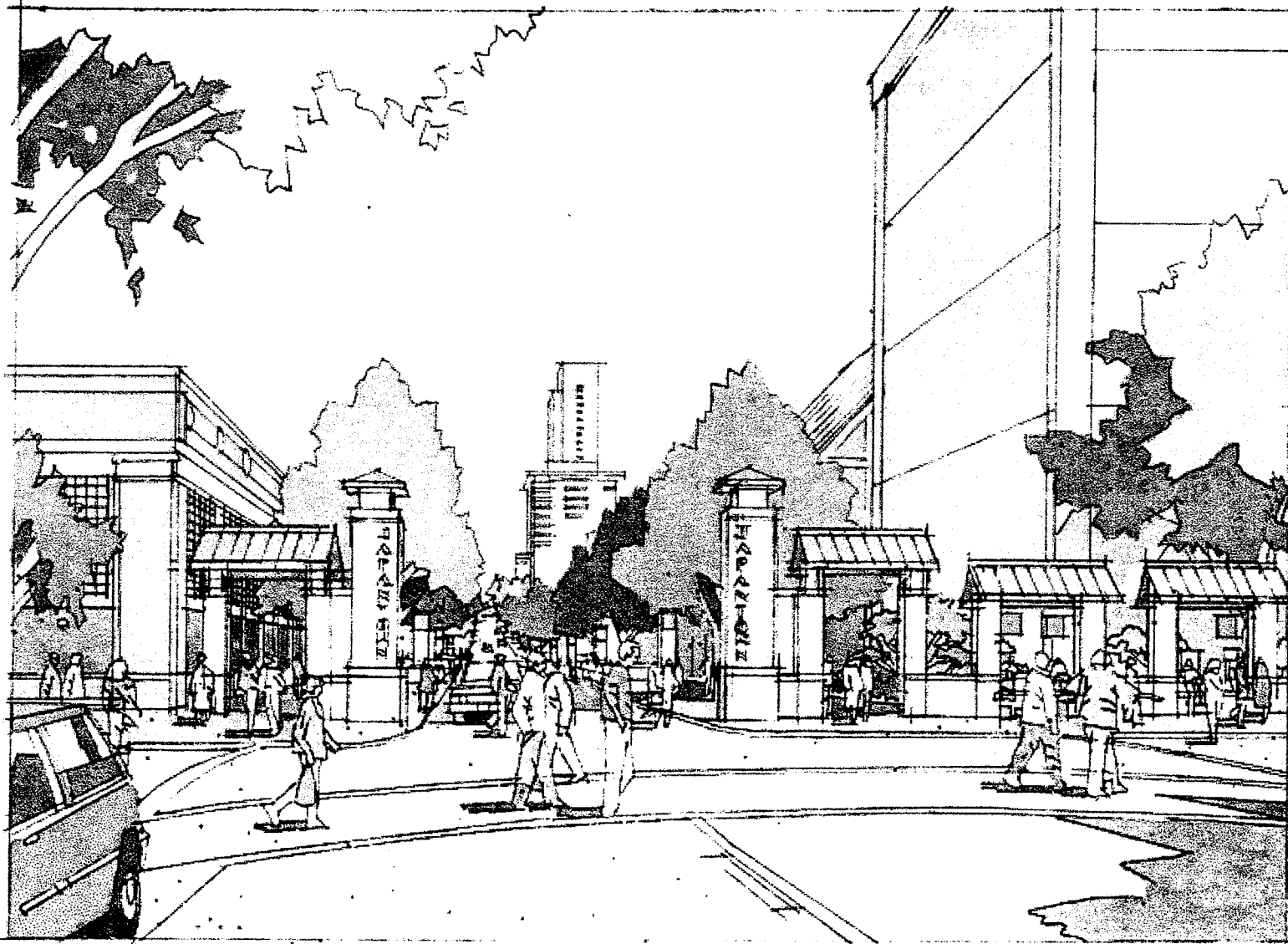


Exhibit 10
Gateway to Japantown:
Post at Fillmore

Planning Subdistricts

The proposed urban framework illustrated previously describes a general framework for the future development of Japantown. In addition, at a more detailed level, there are distinct subdistricts that have unique roles within Japantown's social, economic, and physical environment, as illustrated in Exhibit 11. The economic and physical planning programs and concepts that will make up the Japantown Community Plan should recognize and strengthen these subdistricts and strengthen their unique roles within the study area and city as a whole.

Japantown Core

Bounded by Bush, Geary, Laguna, and Fillmore, this is the area of highest intensity activity within Japantown and an area where commercial, cultural, and community uses are concentrated. It is Japantown's "public" district. Notwithstanding the importance of Japantown's residential neighborhoods, it is the area where economic and physical planning strategies can have the greatest impact. The core comprises the following subdistricts:

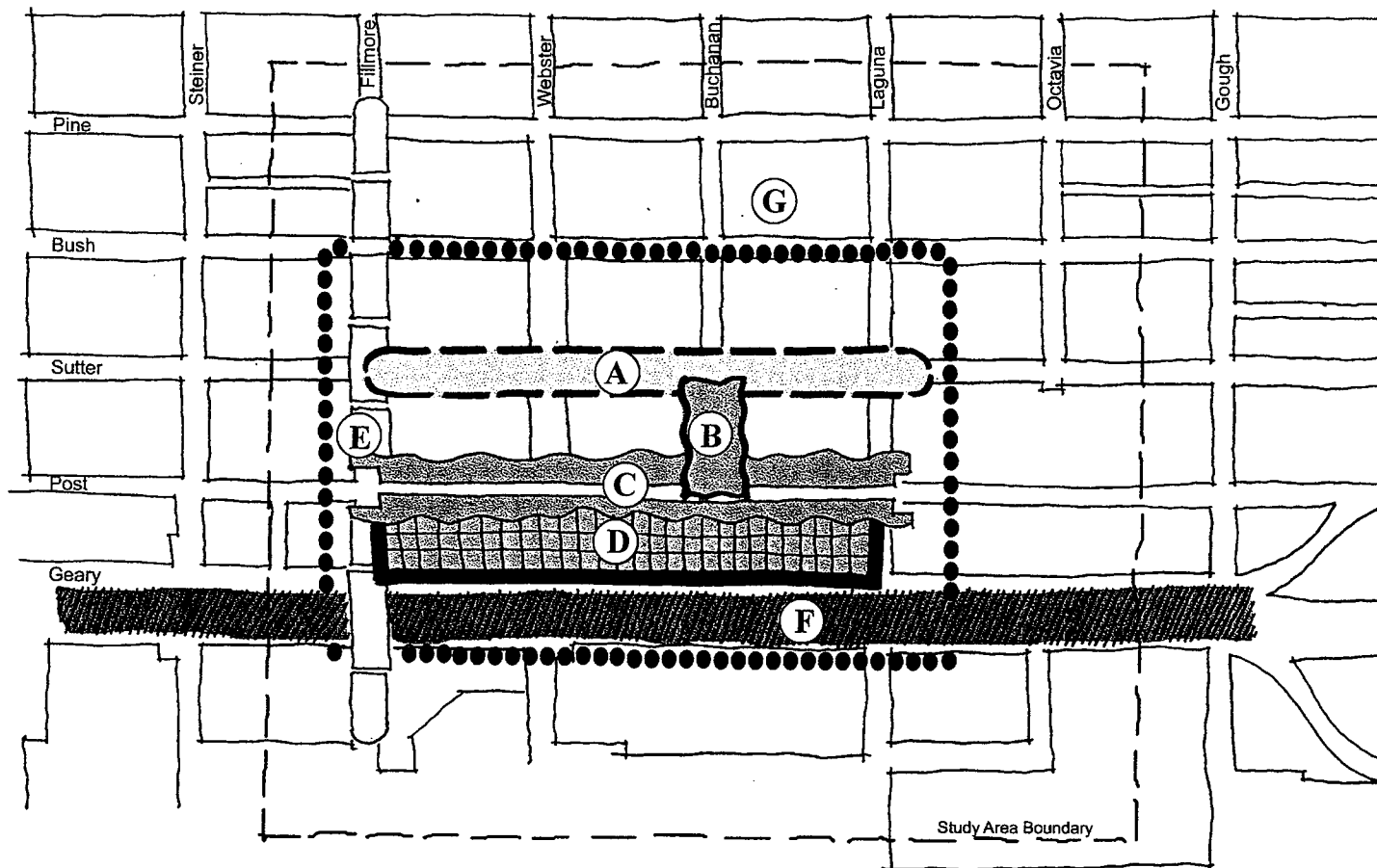
- **Geary Corridor** is a major transportation corridor and street of citywide importance. Adjacent to Japantown, Geary is a high-rise, high-density corridor. The Sequoias, Cathedral Hill Apartments, Webster Tower, Cathedral Hill Condominiums, Post International, and Fillmore Center all are located along the Geary Corridor within or adjacent to the study area. This concentration of high-density development suggests that opportunities to intensify the development of Japantown along the corridor for office and residential uses that would help support other objectives in the neighborhood may be appropriate.
- **Japan Center**, fronting most of Geary and Post within the study area, is the primary defining element of Japantown due to its size and prominence. Similar to the anchor of a retail mall, it is the index of Japantown's overall vitality and viability. While Japan Center provides some goods and services to the surrounding neighborhood, it is primarily a regional and subregional facility serving visitors and tourists from throughout the Bay Area and beyond. As the "economic engine" of Japantown, the success of the Japan Center is critical to the economic health of the area and, therefore, needs to be considered in any comprehensive planning for Japantown.
- **Post Street Commercial Core** is an important transition zone between the greater density and scale of Geary, including Japan Center, and Japantown's residential and cultural uses. With the character and scale of a typical San Francisco neighborhood commercial district or small town "main street," Post currently serves the Japantown residential neighborhood as well as visitors to the community and has the potential to become a much more vital neighborhood commercial street.
- **Sutter Street Community/Cultural Core.** Many of Japantown's most important community, religious and cultural institutions, which serve both the local community and Japanese Americans throughout Northern California, are located along Sutter Street or in close proximity.
- **Buchanan Mall** is Japantown's "community crossroads" forging a link between commercial and cultural subdistricts. Considered the symbolic heart of the Japantown community, the Buchanan Mall primarily contains small-scale retail uses with some community/cultural and office uses. Like Post Street, the mall has the potential to expand its commercial draw.

- ***Fillmore Street Corridor*** describes the currently underutilized stretch of Fillmore bordering Japantown between Geary and Bush—the “facade” of Japantown along one of San Francisco’s most popular neighborhood commercial streets. Fillmore Street offers opportunities to intensify residential and commercial development that would give Japantown a strong and visible presence to visitors along this important commercial corridor.

Japantown Residential District

Includes the residential neighborhoods, which surround the Japantown Core. This district consists of original Victorians as well as more recent housing of varying densities. The existing lower density and smaller scale of these neighborhoods should be preserved. Economic and physical planning concepts for the Community Plan provide an opportunity to reshape the character of the neighborhood and provide leadership in achieving important changes that the city has been unable to provide but that, nonetheless, will benefit both Japantown and the city as a whole. Japantown’s unique subdistricts define an economic and physical planning framework that should underlie the elements of the Community Plan. The priority economic projects, urban design concepts, and detailed implementation plan must be based on the overall framework and the subdistricts defined above. These elements are interrelated and represent a holistic approach to achieving a vision for Japantown that focuses on the long-term, sustainable preservation and enhancement of the community’s cultural, spiritual, commercial and residential uses.

Exhibit 11
Planning Subdistricts



●●● Japantown Core Boundary

Subdistricts

- Ⓐ Sutter Street Community/
Cultural Core
- Ⓑ Buchanan Mall
- Ⓒ Post Street Commercial Core
- Ⓓ Japan Center
- Ⓔ Fillmore Street Corridor
- Ⓕ Geary Corridor
- Ⓖ Residential Neighborhoods



Circulation and Access Issues

The transportation system is vital to the economic health of a commercial district or neighborhood. It provides a critical link to the surrounding city and region and is fundamental to moving about an area. The transportation system also provides the physical framework around which land use patterns develop. When the land uses and transportation system serving them are of a compatible scale and character, a positive relationship develops and the neighborhoods or districts are inviting to users. Conversely, if the scale and character of the land use and transportation systems are not compatible, it may be detrimental to the success and attractiveness of a neighborhood.

These issues are clearly demonstrated in an analysis of circulation and access issues in Japantown, and illustrated in Exhibit 12. Among the key observations:

- Japantown is bisected by several high capacity transportation corridors, which emphasize through vehicular movement over pedestrian circulation. All of the east west streets in Japantown - Geary Expressway, Post Street, Sutter Street, Bush Street and Pine Street – are broad streets ranging in width from three travel lanes to eight travel lanes. These broad streets emphasize through-movement rather than local auto and pedestrian access to serve local businesses, cultural uses and residences. While these broad and open streets provide easy access to Japantown, there is not a strong sense of destination or local orientation.
- Japantown has a high level of transit service. However, it is located peripheral to Post Street, the primary neighborhood commercial street. Patrons must walk from (or across) Geary Expressway and from Sutter Street to do business. This is contrary to the prevailing pattern of transit service found throughout San Francisco, which is typically provided directly on all neighborhood commercial streets. Direct transit service ensures a high degree of pedestrian accessibility for businesses and enhances the visibility of the commercial uses. Furthermore, there are not well-defined entrances to the Japantown shopping district from transit stops along Geary Expressway and only one along Sutter Street (at the Buchanan Mall).
- Japantown has a large supply of off-street parking compared to other commercial districts in the city. However, the off-street parking facilities are not clearly visible to visitors to the area. Double parking occurs along Post Street resulting in traffic disruption.
- The broad streets in the district detract from pedestrian comfort and the creation of a pedestrian scale shopping district that invites shoppers and visitors to explore on foot. It is difficult for shoppers to cross Post Street, a broad neighborhood street and the heart of the commercial district. The crossing between Japan Center and the Buchanan Street Mall, which serves high volumes of pedestrians, could use better delineation. The lack of businesses with direct access onto Post Street compound the pedestrian scale issues associated with the broad streets. Some of the Geary Expressway crossings are unsafe for pedestrians to cross due to their width and the timing of the lights. The pedestrian bridges on Webster and Geary contribute to the feeling that the street level is not a desirable place for pedestrians.

- Geary Expressway, which provides the most frequent transit service, and a connection to major residential uses to the south of Japantown, is inhospitable to pedestrians. This results from the heavy traffic volumes, the width of the street, the lack of pedestrian amenities and scale, the pedestrian overcrossing which take people off the street level, and the large blank walls presented by the Japan Center.
- There is a lack of secure bicycle storage facilities visible from the street level in Japantown.

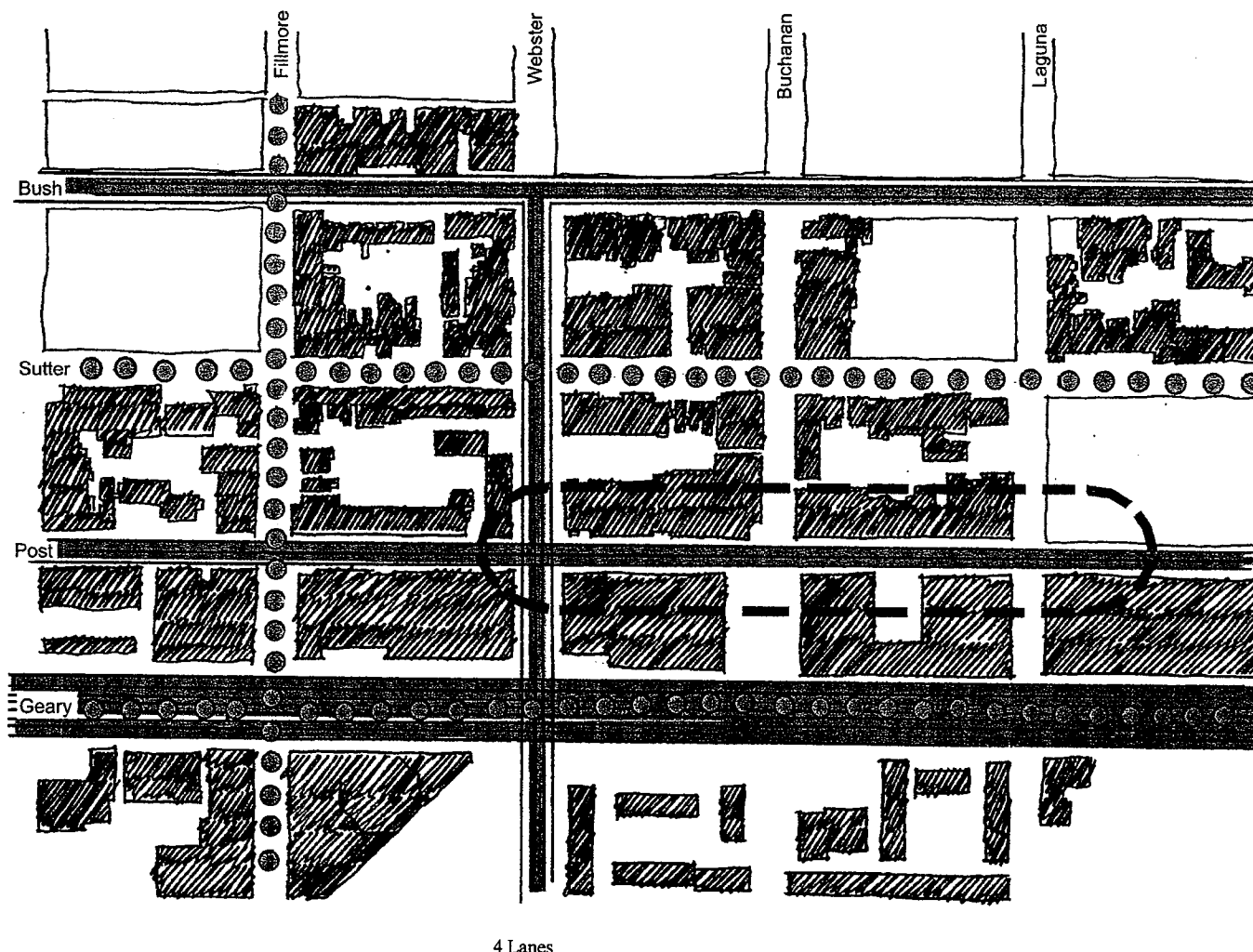





Exhibit 12
Circulation and Access

3 Lanes
(High speed through traffic)

3 Lanes

8 Lanes
(High speed through traffic)

Legend

-  Major Vehicular Streets
-  Transit Corridors
-  Neighborhood Commercial Core

4 Lanes



Pedestrian Environment

With the exception of the Buchanan Mall, the newly renovated Peace Plaza and surrounding residential streets, most of the public spaces in Japantown are not inviting for people to walk, socialize or relax. This is the result of several factors, including:

Unfriendly Edges

- Blank walls at street level along Geary, Fillmore and Post offer no street-level activity or invitation for people to walk and experience the street.
- Stairs and ramps from Geary to the Peace Plaza have a secondary, “back door” feel.
- Blank facades of Japan Center facing the Peace Plaza impede active flow of pedestrians.

Spatial Structure Designed for the Automobile

- Street width and speed of traffic on Geary are intimidating to the pedestrian
- Excessive street width on Webster, Post and Sutter
- High traffic speeds on Bush Street

Difficult Pedestrian Street Crossings

- Unsafe at-grade crossings on Geary, especially for children and seniors.
- Geary Bridge feels isolated and unsafe for people.
- No at-grade crossing at Webster.
- Poorly defined pedestrian crossing on Post between the Buchanan Mall and Peace Plaza.

Lack of Perceived Safety and Few Streetscape Amenities

- Lack of seating, pedestrian-scale lighting, and other amenities on major and secondary streets discourage more active use by people in Japantown.
- Cobbles at Buchanan Mall make uncomfortable walking surface, but are an historically important part of the imagery of the Mall.
- Ficus trees along Sutter cast heavy shade and block streetlights.

- Lack of street activity means fewer “eyes on the street.”
- Heaved and broken sidewalks impede pedestrians, particularly seniors.

Pedestrian Framework Plan

A key element of the success of the economic development strategy for Japantown will be the establishment of a strong physical design framework that promotes walking, socializing, relaxing, and shopping in Japantown through pedestrian linkages and amenities. This has the potential to achieve several objectives, including:

- Increase economic activity as people are encouraged to linger.
- Reduce short auto trips from the nearby neighborhood.
- Improve communication and relationships between people residing in the surrounding neighborhoods, in particular across the Geary Expressway.

Exhibit 13 illustrates a proposal for the geographic extent of the core pedestrian precinct in Japantown. Among its features:

- Provide easy pedestrian connections across Geary at all cross streets and intersections. This will likely require changes to the design of the Geary Expressway. For a more complete discussion of these possibilities, see discussions regarding changes to the Geary Expressway, later in this report.
- Develop streetscape improvements that provide comfort for people walking on all primary pedestrian routes throughout the Japantown core. This is particularly important on Post Street, which serves as the neighborhood commercial main street of Japantown.
- Throughout the primary pedestrian precincts of the core, promote land uses adjacent to primary pedestrian routes that are people-friendly. Encourage active ground floor uses, including retail and restaurants, building transparency, and attractive lighting. Discourage blank walls and inactive ground floor uses.
- Implement traffic calming measures on all streets in the core pedestrian precinct to provide greater advantage to pedestrians over vehicular traffic.
- Surrounding residential neighborhoods generally already provide attractive pedestrian environments due to the relationship of residential frontages, gardens and facades to the street.

Additional improvements to be considered are described in Section III, Streetscape Definition.

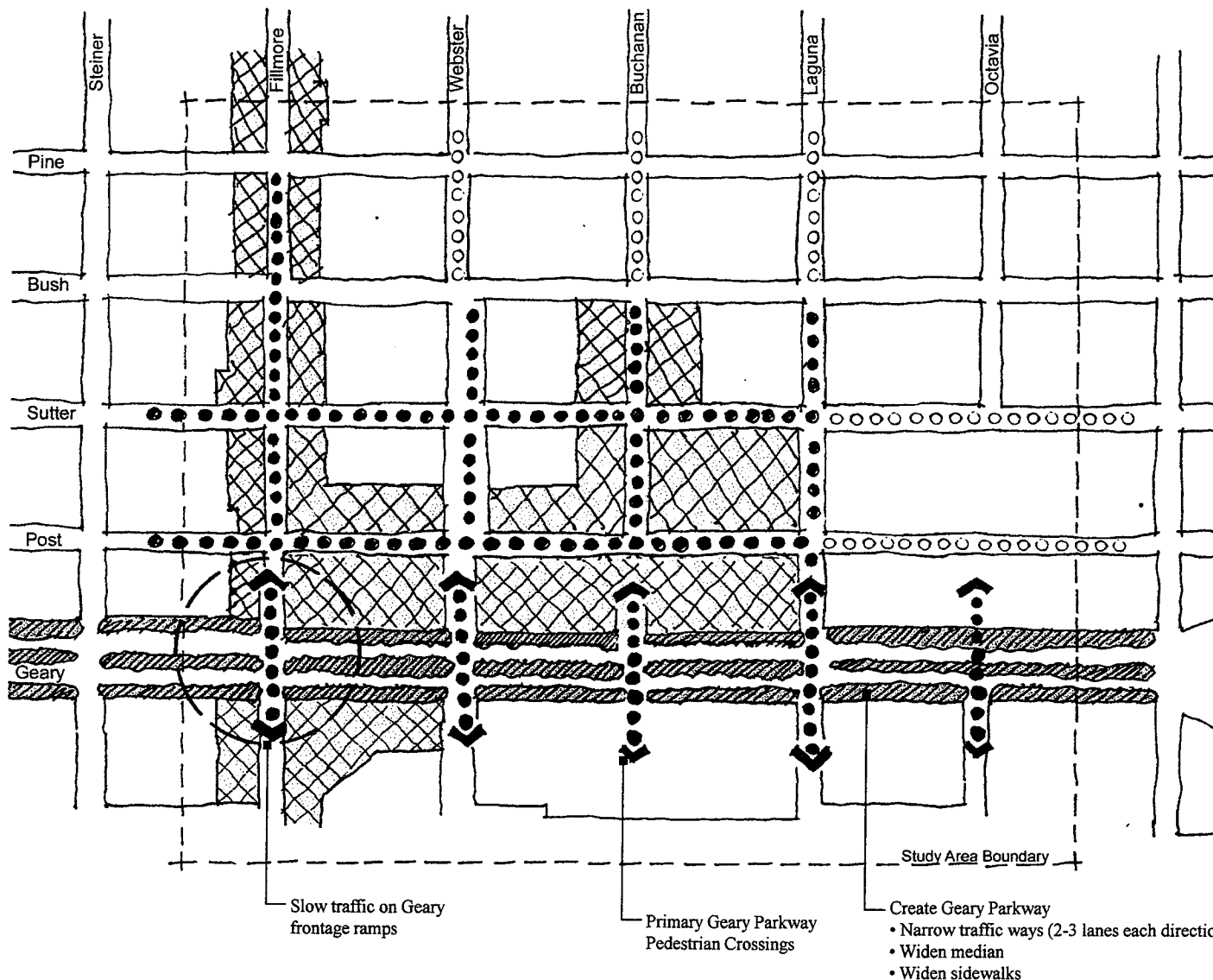


Exhibit 13 Pedestrian Environment






Task Force Objective 4.4

Provide a streetscape that is safe, lively, pleasant and comfortable.

Task Force Objective 4.6

Provide easy access to Japantown for all ages by foot, car, bicycle and public transportation.

Legend

-  Primary Pedestrian Precincts
Encourage pedestrian-oriented uses and design
-  Primary Pedestrian Routes
-  Pedestrian Routes
-  Geary Corridor
-  Geary Crossings



Streetscape Definition

A key element in the character of city districts and neighborhoods is the streetscape, which includes the street, sidewalks, plantings, lighting and other materials and elements located in the public right of way between building facades. The buildings which define the street are also an important component of streetscape character by helping to define whether a street is people-friendly or uninteresting to pedestrians. In many neighborhoods of San Francisco, streetscape is very basic and consists of plain concrete sidewalks, a limited number of street trees, and standard roadway lighting. In some particularly memorable areas, however, special streetscape treatments contribute to a uniquely memorable image. These are particularly successful when the streetscape treatment relates to the unique character of the neighborhood.

Streetscape Design Issues

In Japantown the streetscape does not express the overall framework of Japantown nor does it contribute a special character or image for the district. Among the issues:

General

- Streets are undifferentiated with respect to their purpose and relative importance.
- The area lacks a defined hierarchy of streets and streetscape design elements.
- Streetscape elements do not express a recognizable image of Japantown, its culture or its history.
- The blank walls of Japan Center and its internal focus isolates it from other commercial uses along Post Street and does not contribute to an inviting streetscape.
- Buchanan Mall contains some of Japantown's most unique expressions of its cultural heritage. However, empty storefronts, poor maintenance, incongruous planter posts and other stock furnishings detract from this otherwise well-crafted streetscape environment, resulting in a run-down look.

Gateways

- With the exception of the *torii* and Peace Pagoda, there are very few identifying markers that announce arrival at Japantown.

Planting

- With the exception of the Buchanan Mall and Peace Plaza, very few locations in Japantown contain plantings reflecting the history or cultural identity of the area.
- Planting is poorly maintained.

- Inappropriate tree species are used, such as Ficus, whose dense canopies block street lighting and views of storefront signage and do not present a unique image or character.

Lighting

- Outside of the Buchanan Mall and Peace Plaza, existing lighting does not give pedestrian scale or express community identity.
- Illuminated signs and storefront lighting on major commercial streets - Post, Fillmore and Geary - are undistinguished.

Graphics and Signage

- Signage for retail, restaurants and other commercial establishments provide the strongest image of Japantown. However the quality of this signage is uneven.
- In general, signage is random and spotty throughout the study area.
- The lack of well-signed parking creates confusion for drivers.
- Sites of historical and cultural significance are not clearly or consistently marked.
- Street signs are the city standard and convey nothing unique about Japantown.

Street Furnishings

- With the exception of the Buchanan Mall and newly renovated Peace Plaza, street furnishings consist of stock trash receptacles and newsracks.
- Stock concrete planters in the Buchanan Mall detract from this well-designed environment.

Special Amenities

- With the exception of the origami fountains and other elements in the Buchanan Mall and the Peace Plaza, there are few special amenities within Japantown.

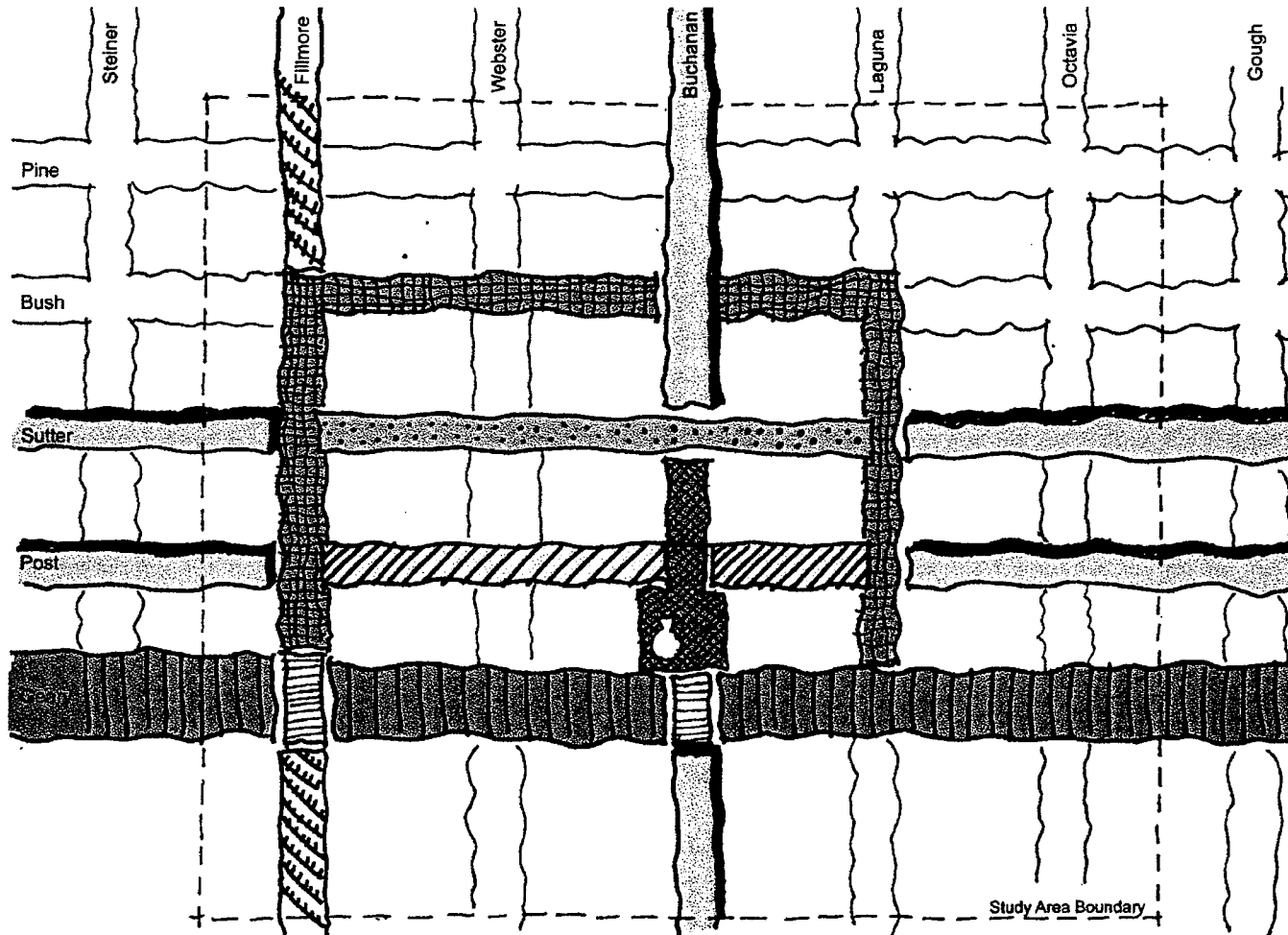


Exhibit 14

Streetscape Definition









Task Force Objective 4.1

Develop a cohesive urban design vision for Japantown by highlighting its center and better defining its edges.

Task Force Objective 4.4

Provide a streetscape that is safe, lively, pleasant and comfortable.

Legend

-  **Geary Corridor**
Corridor-length landscape expression (City-wide).
-  **Framework Streets**
Streetscape defines edge of Japantown core.
-  **Commercial Core**
"Main Street" streetscape.
-  **Community Core**
Streetscape links Japantown cultural institutions.
-  **Community Crossroads**
Most symbolic streetscape expression in the community.
-  **Community Core Access Corridors**
Streetscape defines approach to Japantown.
-  **Residential Streets**
Informal localized landscape.
-  **Neighborhood Commercial Streets**
Not expressive of Japantown



Streetscape Concept

Exhibit 14 describes the proposed concept for streetscape improvements in Japantown. The concept is based on following key objectives:

- Reinforce the urban design framework concept
- Re-establish a hierarchy of streetscape expression
- Provide unique design expressions on certain streets that reflects the unique role, character or image that the street plays in the community.

The hierarchy of streets and general concepts include:

Geary Corridor

Geary is one of the great streets of San Francisco that connects several neighborhoods and binds the city together. Comparable streets include Market Street and the Embarcadero. Therefore, design of the Geary streetscape should not be specific to Japantown, but rather should provide a corridor-length expression to signify its role as a street of citywide importance. This would include unifying street trees, street lighting, signage and other elements, which express the entire corridor. In the future, when a light rail system is extended along Geary, elements of that system will also help unify the corridor.

Framing Streets

The framing streets - Fillmore, Bush and Laguna provide local access, define the edge of Japantown's core and notify passersby of access to Japantown. Streetscape elements should include:

- Gateways (or visual cues) on all cross streets
- Street trees that differentiate this segment of the street from adjacent street sections
- Specialty directional signage
- Accent lighting to emphasize gateways.

Commercial Core

Post Street between Fillmore and Laguna is the neighborhood commercial core street of Japantown. As such, it should be designed with a unique "main street" streetscape including:

- Widened sidewalks

- Special paving along the entire length
- Unique deciduous tree species that provide open branching to allow visibility of storefronts.
- Distinctive, pedestrian-scale street lighting combined with accent and storefront lighting to create a lively and engaging nighttime atmosphere. A white light source (i.e. metal halide) should be used to enhance the appearance of people and features in the area
- High quality commercial signage.

In addition, building development along the street should enhance streetscape improvements, including:

- Building setbacks to extend the sidewalk and create mini-plazas for street vendors, seating, and special landscape treatments.
- Encourage development of entertainment and public attraction uses along Post Street.
- Encourage community serving retail uses.
- Provide open window displays and street gallery spaces.
- Encourage building design that includes transparency and activity. In particular renovate the Japan Center and Japantown Bowl building to provide transparency and multiple access points and encourage active ground floor uses.
- Encourage a facade treatment of the Japan Center buildings that reflects a smaller scale streetscape.

Community Cultural Core

Sutter Street is the community cultural core of Japantown. The streetscape on Sutter should be designed to express its role as the area with the highest concentration of community cultural and educational institutions. In contrast with Post, the streetscape should be quiet and contemplative, and contain elements that are designed, produced, and installed by members of the neighborhood and Japanese American community. Such elements might include:

- Streetscape to link cultural institutions along Sutter.
- Distinctive, pedestrian-scale lighting and accent lighting to illuminate historical and culturally important architecture and places.
- A unique tree species.

- New cultural and neighborhood uses concentrated along and in proximity to Sutter.
- Places which include seating for neighborhood meetings, gatherings, and rest, particularly adjacent to cultural institutions and organizations that serve the elderly.

Community Crossroads

As Japantown's major civic spaces, the Buchanan Mall and Peace Plaza should continue to be given the most symbolic design expressions in the community.

- The river motif, origami fountains, and spiritual gathering place should be preserved.
- Develop a comprehensive plan for the continued renovation and upkeep of the Buchanan Mall including:
 - Coordinate with plans by Sakura Matsuri, Inc. to restore the *torii* gate and Japanese lantern light standards
 - Replace the existing concrete planters with custom designed planter pots of the quality of design and craftsmanship of Ruth Asawa's benches and origami fountains. Commission local artists.
 - establish a maintenance program in cooperation with the city for regular upkeep of the Buchanan Mall and Peace Plaza that ensures community stewardship.
 - Use accent lighting at the *torii* and Peace Pagoda.
- Renovate the Japan Center to provide active uses such as retail and restaurants all around the Peace Plaza. Provide space on the Peace Plaza to allow restaurant and retail uses to spill out and activate the Plaza.

Community Access Corridors

As the primary access corridors to the Japantown core, streets should include signage and other streetscape elements to reinforce the main approach to Japantown and access to parking facilities. Like Framework Streets, streetscape elements would include:

- Uniform street tree species for the blocks approaching Japantown
- Signage and banners as part of the approach or signaling entrance to Japantown.

Residential Streets

The surrounding residential streets of Japantown should provide a background with which the special character of the Japantown core is set. They are also an area of cultural diversity that is no longer dominated by Japanese American residents. The residential streets would have an informal localized landscape and can reflect the character of the particular block or adjacent property owner.

Neighborhood Commercial Streets

Outside the Japantown core, the streetscape treatment of neighborhood commercial streets, i.e., upper and lower Fillmore - should not be expressive of Japantown but should reflect the character of upper or lower Fillmore subdistricts.

Correcting Planning and Design Errors of the Past

Several of the physical planning and design strategies that were employed in rebuilding Japantown under urban renewal policies from 1950 to 1970 have resulted in an urban environment that is not easily sustainable. During the postwar years, contemporary planning and urban design theory took a noted departure from historic patterns of urban and community development. These new attitudes of urban development were widely applied in urban renewal programs in rebuilding cities around the country. The most important characteristics of these urban development theories included:

- Reliance on the automobile for nearly all transportation needs. Existing rail transit lines were removed and a web of major highways and arterials were constructed as the preferred means of transportation, offering unprecedented speed and convenience.
- Accommodation of the automobile as a primary factor in the design of the city environment, often to the detriment of pedestrians, residential areas, parks and neighborhood commercial centers. In Japantown, much of the physical environment has been shaped by accommodations to the automobile, including the excessively wide Geary Expressway; the four-lane Webster arterial, and Japan Center, which is designed to promote access directly from the internal parking garage without encouraging use of the street by pedestrians.
- Large scale single use development. Post war planning and urban design theory envisioned cities made up of massive mega-block projects, often out of scale with surrounding neighborhoods and pedestrian areas, usually with all activities sized, and designed with the harsh architectural rigor of Modernism. In many cases, such development has proven to be out of scale with the pedestrian environment and detrimental to the overall urban quality of life. In Japantown, the Japan Center was conceived, planned, and designed on this model. As a result, it presents impediments to neighborhood vitality and success. Combined with the Geary Expressway, the Japan Center is a great barrier, separating two or three important neighborhood communities of the city.

Today as a result of living with several decades of post-war planning and design theory, it is clear that many of these environments are not desirable urban places and, in many cases, are impossible to sustain. In Japantown, a transition from these post-war planning concepts can be a vital component in achieving long-term success.

Four major opportunities to introduce change in Japantown, in an effort to create a more viable and attractive urban environment are discussed below. These include:

- Geary Expressway
- Webster Street
- Japan Center

- Post Street

It should be noted that the recommendations to correct these post-war era investments are not short term, low cost initiatives. Like the urban renewal programs that created the existing environment, long term planning and investment will be required. However, in recent years it has been shown that major changes to the urban fabric are possible (such as the removal of the Embarcadero Freeway and redesign of the corridor to create a multi-use boulevard.)

It also should be noted that not all of the development that occurred in the Japantown area is inappropriate. There are many well-scaled areas in and near Japantown, such as Buchanan Mall, St. Francis Square, and other housing throughout the area. In addition, the community has had the benefit of the internal creation of certain institutions and uses (public and private) that have generated numerous positive economic, social and cultural contributions to the community, such as JCCCNC and the Japantown Bowl.

Geary Expressway

Geary Street, in the vicinity of Japantown, is a 8-lane roadway (designated an Expressway) with parking on either side and narrow sidewalks. The total right-of-way width is approximately 165 feet, making it one of the widest streets in San Francisco. As mentioned previously it was conceived in the great road-building era of the 1950's when freeways and expressways were envisioned to speed traffic throughout the city. There are many issues related to the Geary Expressway which affect the surrounding neighborhoods of the area:

- It appears that Geary is overdesigned with excess capacity (peak period observations show traffic moves freely through the area.)
- Traffic speeds are very high. The differential between posted speeds and actual traffic speeds are alarming, particularly in the westbound direction as motorists accelerate down from Cathedral Hill.
- Extreme width and high traffic speeds make it difficult for pedestrians to cross, particularly the large numbers of elderly that reside in the area.
- Considerable noise results from high traffic speeds and volumes
- Walls of the Japan Center and Geary traffic discourage pedestrian activity and increase the lack of security for pedestrians especially at night. It has been the scene of robberies and violent crime
- It is an unattractive environment for pedestrians, adjacent residents and businesses.

Further studies are required to determine if the current traffic capacity of the Geary Expressway is needed. However, preliminary review by traffic consultants indicate excess capacity may exist. (The eight-lane section of the Geary Expressway carries less traffic than the six-lane section of the Embarcadero.) If so, major changes to the Geary Expressway would be desirable, similar to corrective measures that are underway to redesign the Embarcadero, the Central Freeway, Doyle Drive and others, and thereby restitch the fabric of the neighborhoods together.

Exhibit 15 illustrates a proposed concept for a revised cross-section of Geary (here renamed the Geary Parkway) which would reallocate the use of space within the right of way. Key features of this redesign include:

- A cross-section similar in arrangement to the Embarcadero.
- Reduction of eight moving vehicular lanes to four or six.
- Wider sidewalks, potentially up to 40 feet in specific locations.
- Opportunity for an exclusive right of way for light rail transit. MUNI has designated Geary as a future rail transit priority corridor.

- Parking and loading in parking pockets rather than continuously along its length, including designated parking for tour buses to support the commercial businesses.
- Easy pedestrian crossings at every cross street from Fillmore to Octavia, with shorter pedestrian crossing distances and multiple pedestrian sanctuaries in the median.
- Wider sidewalk zones providing opportunities for improvements to the Japan Center “wall” along Geary that will enliven the street and improve access to and through the Center. These might include:
 - broad, inviting stairways and ramps leading directly into the Peace Plaza and commercial establishments
 - restaurants and retail that front the Geary Parkway

Exhibit 16 illustrates the possible future character of Geary at the sidewalk adjacent to Japan Center.



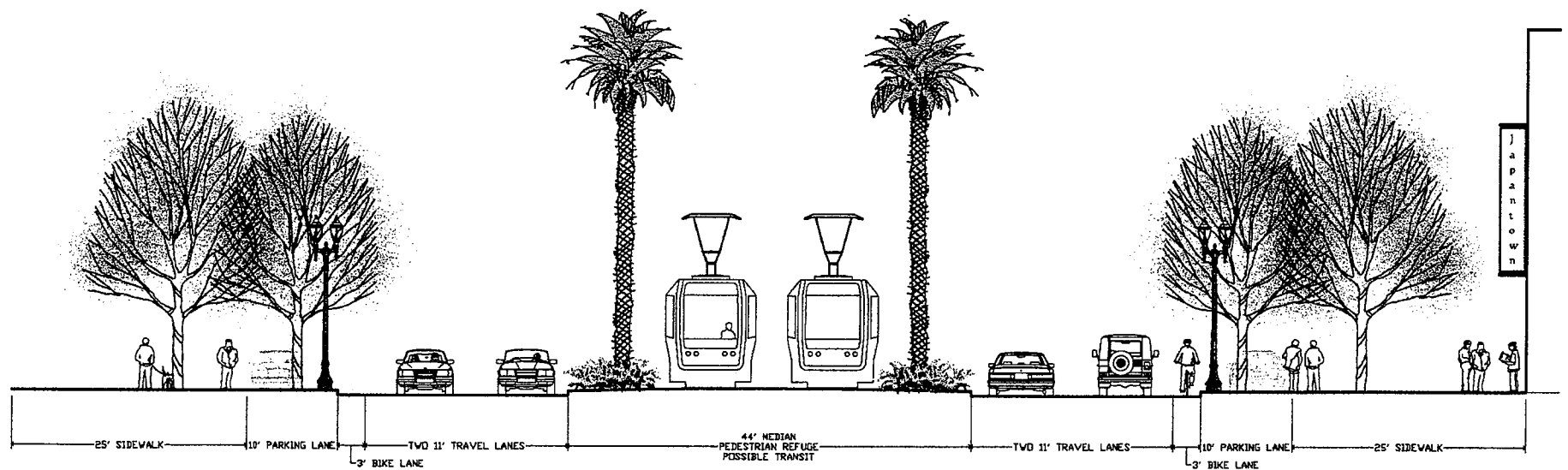
Existing Geary Expressway

Exhibit 15

Geary Parkway Section

Task Force Objective 4.6

*Provide easy access to Japantown for all ages
by foot, car, bicycle, and public transportation.*



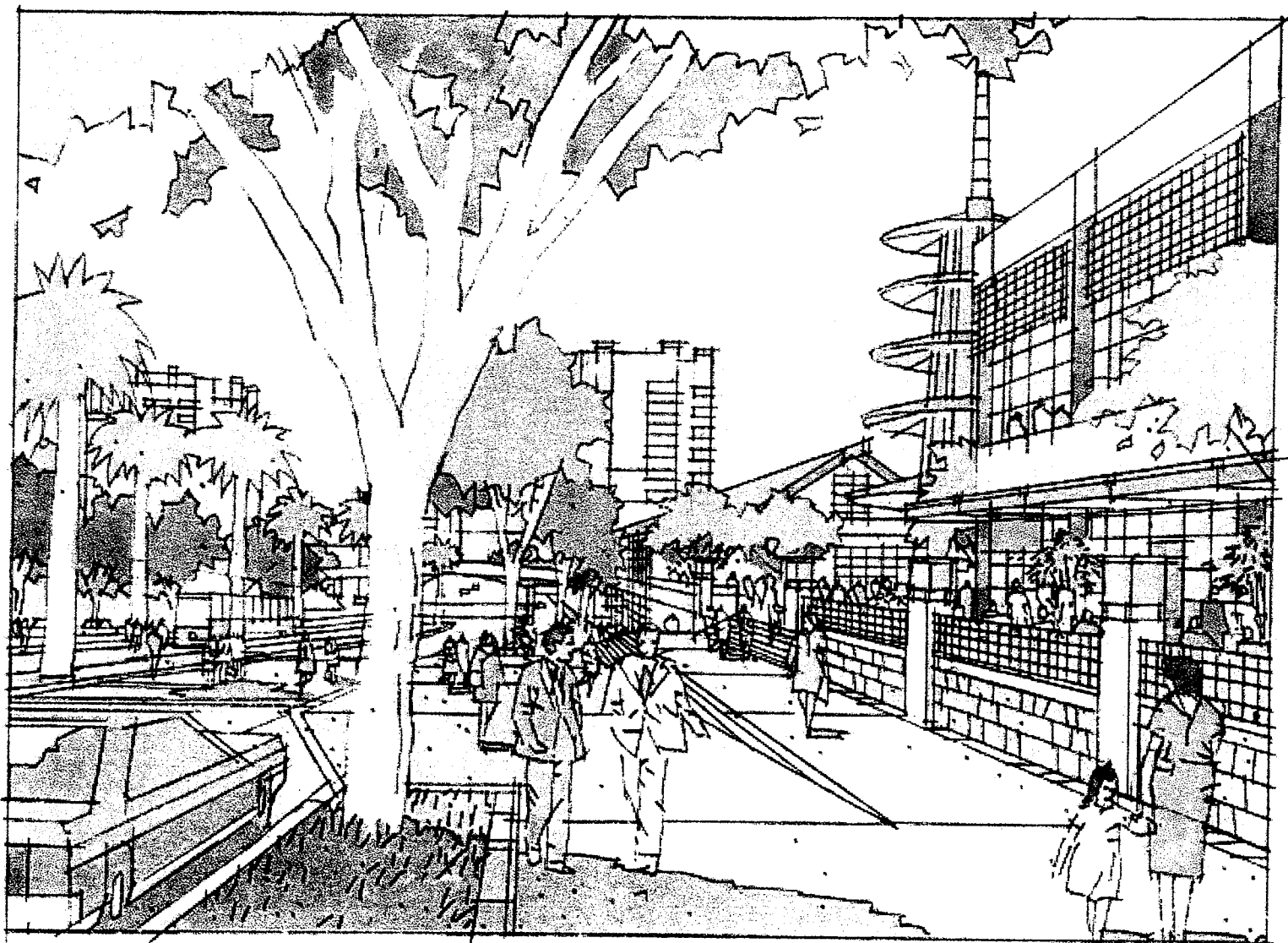


Exhibit 16

Future Geary Parkway at
the Peace Plaza

Webster Street

Like the Geary Expressway, Webster Street between Grove and Bush is designed as a wide boulevard with planted median, clearly designed for significant vehicular volumes and speeds. However, it appears to have been planned to be extended further north and south, because it does not function as a through arterial roadway commensurate with the scale of its design.

While much of Webster appears to be inappropriately wide, it is only the northern-most portion that falls between Geary and Bush that bears the most direct impact upon the character of Japantown. Through this area, Webster Street includes five lanes (four lanes plus left turn pockets), parking, a planted median, and narrow sidewalks. (see Exhibit 17) North of Bush Street, it narrows to a two lane street.

Like Geary, there are many issues related to the design of Webster Street that do not enhance the Japantown neighborhood:

- As primarily a local access street, Webster appears to be overdesigned in terms of traffic capacity for its role in the city street network
- It seldom, if ever, operates at capacity, with little congestion in the peak hour.
- Webster separates east and west portions of the Japantown core, and poses a considerable challenge for pedestrians to cross.
- The northbound right lane ends at Bush Street This configuration appears unnecessary in connecting major destinations in this portion of city.
- The excessive right-of-way dedicates land to the automobile, which is potentially useful for other community-serving purposes .

Like the Geary Expressway, there is potential to reevaluate the allocation of space along Webster, particularly between Geary and Bush, to the benefit of Japantown. Exhibits 18 and 19 illustrate a concept for the redesign of Webster which could reduce the amount of potentially unneeded automobile space and add improvements which benefit businesses, residents and visitors to Japantown.

Concept Recommendations:

- Narrow Webster to conform to its standard width and alignment north of Bush Street - two vehicular travel lanes and parking both sides
- Recapture unneeded space as a major opportunity area up to 50 feet wide for public improvements such as a public park or garden and a wide sidewalk. The public park could be an integral element for the overall image improvement of Japantown.

Exhibit 17

Webster Street - Existing

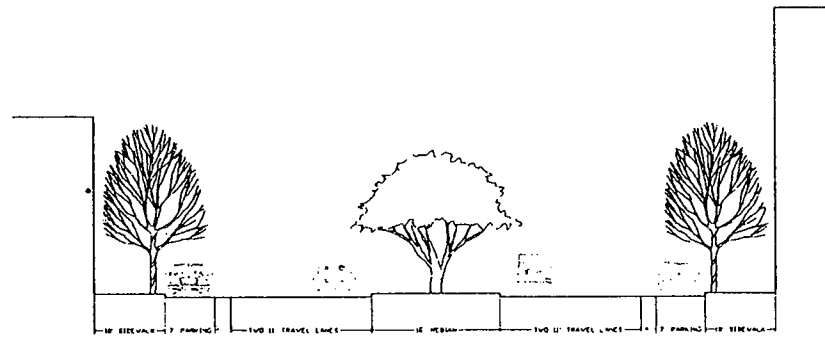
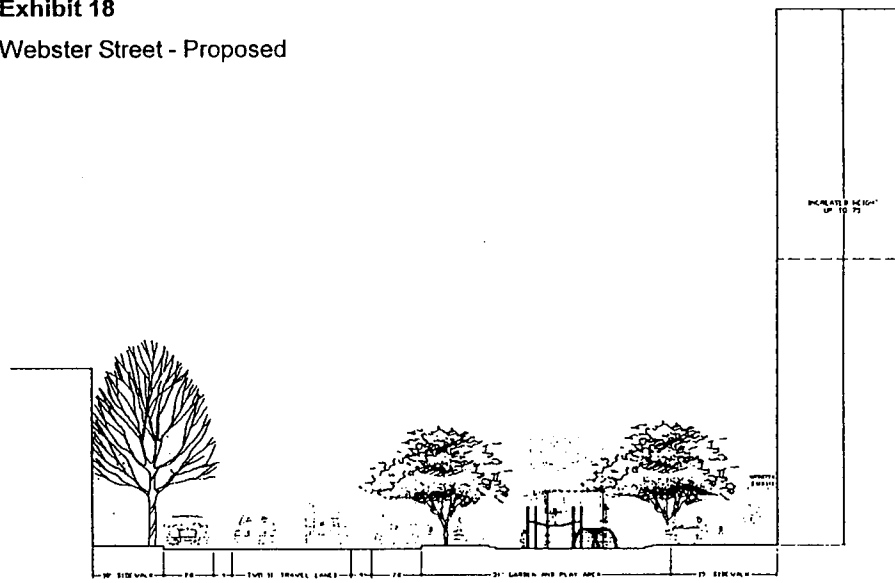


Exhibit 18

Webster Street - Proposed



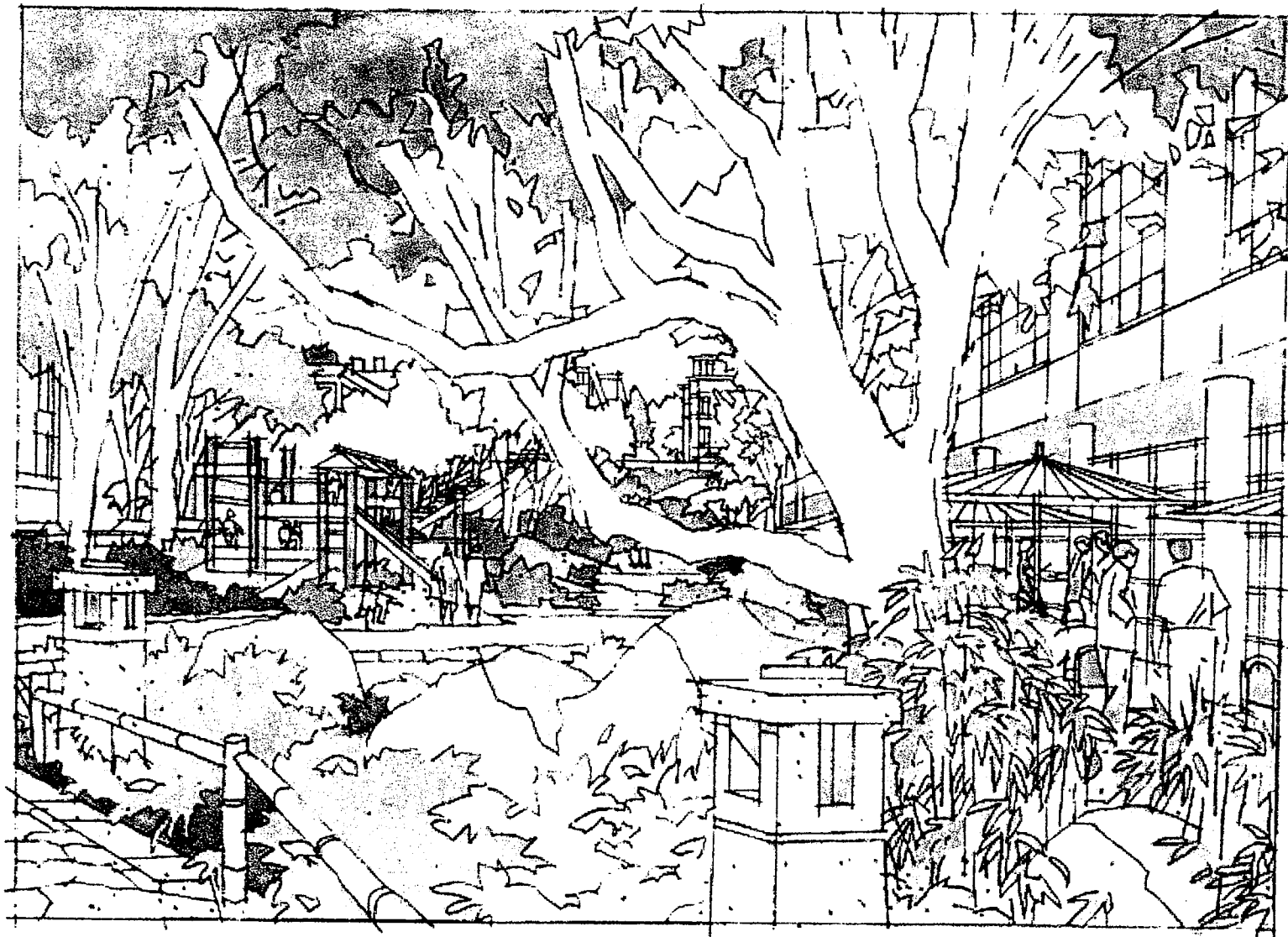


Exhibit 19
Webster Street Gardens

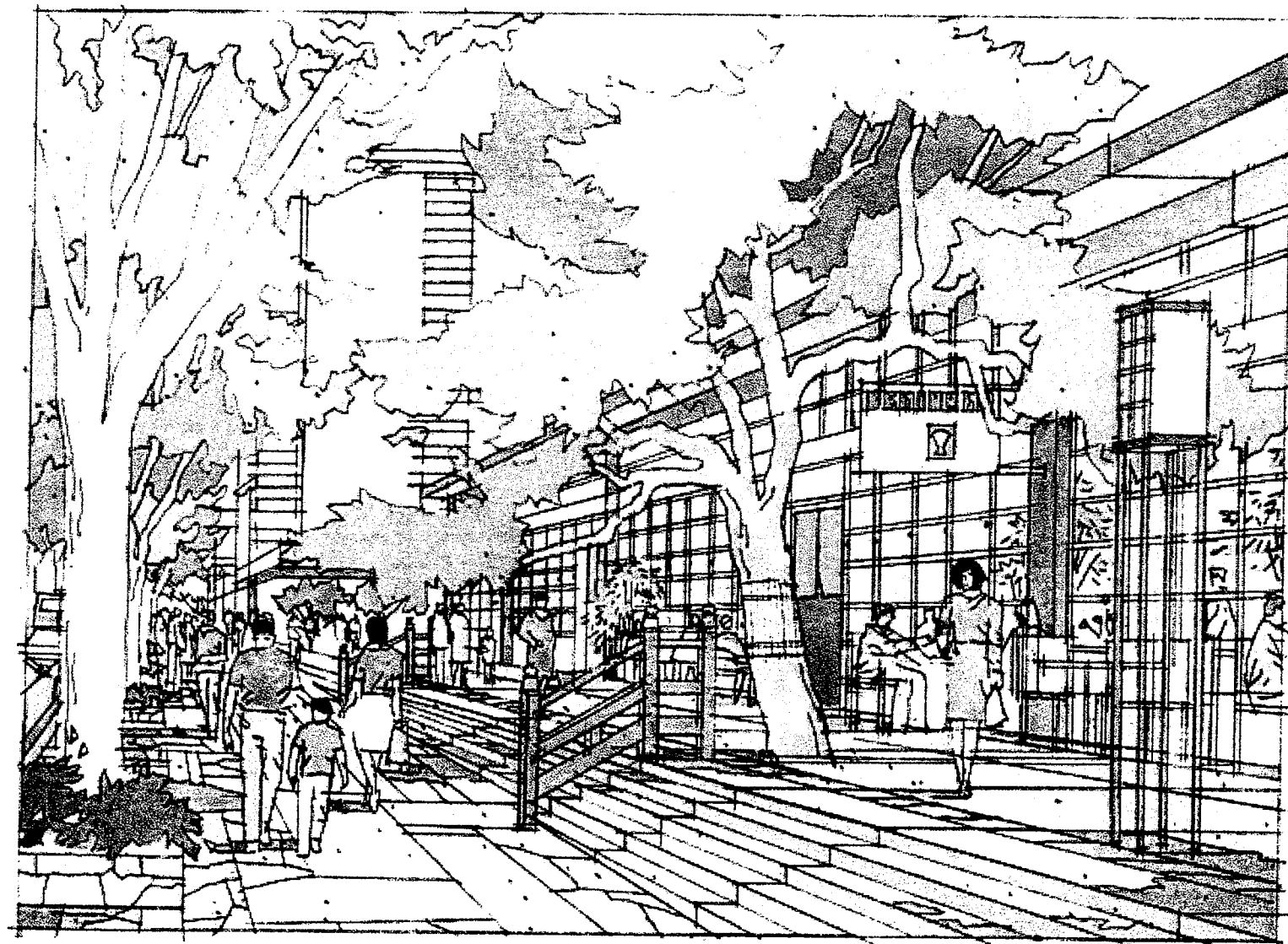


Exhibit 20

Future Japan Center:
Post Street near the Peace
Plaza

Post Street

San Francisco is a city of great neighborhood commercial streets. These streets serve as the “main streets” of their various neighborhoods, providing goods and services, recreation, community identity, transportation access and interesting visitor destinations. Great examples abound: Upper Fillmore, Union, Chestnut, 24th, Sacramento and Clement.

There are common characteristics that make these streets great:

- They are generally narrow (2 vehicular travel lanes).
- Active ground-floor building uses - such as retail and restaurants - are continuous along their length.
- There is a limited amount of passive street level uses such as banks, offices, parking and open space along their length.
- The streetscape is well suited to the street and provides important amenities.

Post Street in Japantown has the potential to be one of the best neighborhood commercial streets in the city. However, it is not successful today for several reasons:

- Like Geary and Webster it is unnecessarily wide for its traffic-carrying requirements.
- Japan Center and Japantown Bowl present blank walls and unattractive facades to the street which do not enhance the sense of activity.
- Passive street level uses such as offices and residential uses, which do not actively engage the street, as well as the wide expanse of Webster Street, discourage pedestrian movement along the street.

Concept Recommendations:

- Provide a continuous unified streetscape including elements as described in Section III, Streetscape Definition.
- Building setbacks or arcades in new building development to provide additional sidewalk space for retail and restaurant activities.
- Corner bulbs at intersections to make pedestrian crossing easier and to provide a location for seating, information, art, and other streetscape enhancements.

- A narrower vehicular street - two travel lanes plus parking on both sides. The space gained can be used to widen sidewalks, particularly on the Japan Center side and to provide space for stairs and ramps needed to gain access to shops that are above street level. The wider sidewalk will also provide additional space for sidewalk cafes and public seating.
- Renovation and updating of the Japan Center will also greatly improve the character of Post Street.

Exhibits 20 and 21 illustrate concepts for improvements that would enhance the street.

Exhibits 26 and 27 illustrate existing conditions on Post Street and one design concept for sidewalk reconfiguration.

Appendix A provides a conceptual cost estimate for streetscape improvements on Post Street.

Japan Center

Like most suburban shopping malls, the Japan Center is designed as a major inward-oriented structure with only a few specific locations for pedestrian access. The design also encourages pedestrian access directly from the below grade parking facility into the internal mall of the center while discouraging access by use of the surrounding streets.

There are several issues related to this design that are not sympathetic with the neighborhood and are out of character with the streets of San Francisco:

- Blank walls, particularly along Post Street, do not promote vitality and a sense of activity
- The inward orientation of the mall and other uses places all vitality internal to the building rather than on the street
- Access from the parking garage (which is public) to the street (which is also public) is very difficult, through two or three narrow and unfriendly stairwells and openings. Garage users are encouraged (indeed, almost forced) to go from the garage directly into the private shopping center. This movement can discourage visitors from visiting other destinations in Japantown which can only be accessed from the public street.
- The Center is outdated aesthetically and in need of a thorough renovation and updating.

San Francisco has led the nation in recent years in efforts to establish guidelines to create streets and public spaces that are attractive and safe for all users, with a particular emphasis on the pedestrian environment. The city has set clear standards for public street design as well as the design of private development that will promote attractive streets. The *Master Plan of the City and County of San Francisco* and specifically the *San Francisco Urban Design Plan* are important policy documents that guide the way building development should occur in the city.

The Japan Center violates many of the fundamental principles on which these policy documents are grounded. Like the Geary Expressway and Webster Street, major changes to the Japan Center are warranted in order to bring it in conformance with the principles of current urban design theory and City of San Francisco policy and to address the issues outlined above. Exhibits 16, 20 and 21 illustrate concepts for the improvement of Japan Center, which should be considered as part of a renovation program.

Concept Recommendations:

- Increase the transparency of walls on both Post Street and Geary to allow the visibility of people and goods inside and to allow attractive light to spill onto the street.
- Provide continuous direct pedestrian access to retail and restaurants from Post and Geary.

- Bring Japan Center into conformance with today's best retail strategies, improving image and accessibility, providing clear indications of what it includes, and making it a much more visible, street-like environment which welcomes shoppers and diners.

Other improvements not shown would include:

- Improved access directly from the lower level parking to the street in all areas.
- Create direct access from AMC Kabuki Theaters to Japantown Center's Kinokuniya Mall.

Exhibit 21

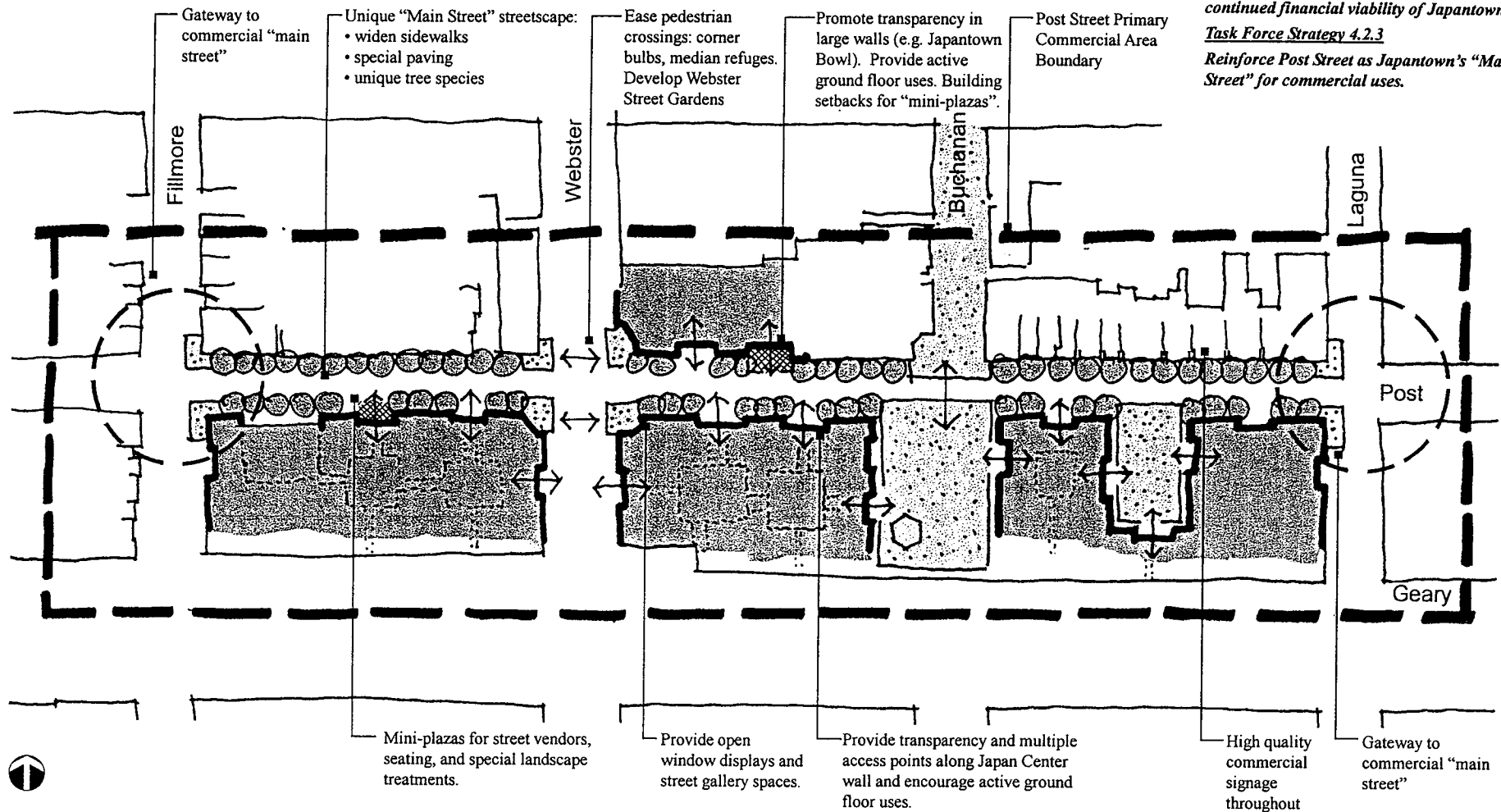
Post Street Commercial Core

Task Force Objective 4.2

Improve and upgrade the physical appearance of Japantown's commercial district to ensure continued financial viability of Japantown.

Task Force Strategy 4.2.3

Reinforce Post Street as Japantown's "Main Street" for commercial uses.



Concepts for the Japantown Community Plan

Establish A Unique Image for Japantown

The urban landscape, among its many roles, is also something to be seen, to be remembered, and to delight in. Giving visual form to the city is a special kind of design problem. -Kevin Lynch, The Image of the City

Prior to World War II, the image of Japantown derived primarily from the numbers of Japanese American residents in the neighborhood, the types of businesses located there, and the visual character on the interior of the shops and public buildings. Japantown was primarily an area of Victorian buildings; the most significant exterior physical image of the area was the Kanji lettering on signs on buildings. Otherwise, there was very little Japanese American expression or imagery evident in the physical environment of the neighborhood.

The need for a strong physical image of Japantown was much less important then than it is today since the neighborhood was composed of a high concentration of Japanese American residents and the economic survival of the neighborhood was not dependent upon the ability to attract outside visitors to a unique environmental experience.

Following World War II, the physical character of Japantown changed dramatically. The image was recast to encompass Modernist design ideals with reference to a Japanese design aesthetic. In many ways portions of Japantown today probably have a stronger, more unique physical image than before WWII.

The Challenge Today

The result of post war change has not worn well. Today the image of Japantown has a deteriorated quality, lacking a cohesive identity, both externally as a destination in the city and region, and internally as a special neighborhood within the city of San Francisco.

There is a substantial risk that the area will no longer be unique within the city as a whole. While much of the area is relatively new in comparison with other sections of the city, initial urban design analysis and comments from neighborhood stakeholders indicate that there is a need for a new vision for Japantown's image. Partly this deficiency is attributable to urban renewal policies and design concepts initiated between the 1950's and 1970's that did not result in a lasting image for the area or one that could transcend changing demographics and economic realities. In addition, in recent years, a pattern of benign neglect has further resulted in a loss of identity and a general deterioration of the physical environment of the neighborhood. As the responsibility for policy guidance and initiative shifts from the Redevelopment Agency to the Planning Department, the Department of Public Works, and other city agencies, this condition can be expected to persist.

The challenge today is to forge a strong new image for Japantown that will:

- Reinforce its identity as a unique neighborhood in San Francisco.

- Serve as a source of pride to local residents and people of the broader Nikkei community.
- Provide a memorable destination for visitors.

The JPPDTF has recognized the importance of establishing a unique identity in defining the following objectives:

2.1 Strengthen tourist activity within Japantown.

2.4 Develop and implement a marketing plan to promote Japantown locally, regionally and worldwide.

4.3 Encourage the design of the buildings, plazas, street furniture, ornament, and landscape to reflect the history of Japantown and to contribute to community identity.

Japantown: Regional Image and Local Sense of Place

There are two important considerations in establishing a strong image for Japantown:

- *Regional image*
- *Local sense of place. That is, the character of the neighborhood that distinguishes it from others.*

Regional Image

Part of the success of Japantown depends upon the ability to attract outside visitors and make it easy for them to find Japantown. As will be discussed in Section IV, in addition to programs for the Japanese American community, marketing programs that promote tourism and first-time visitors will be an important part of a successful economic development program for Japantown.

Various programs utilizing design elements can play an important role in projecting Japantown's image. Among the most important of these are signage and wayfinding systems placed throughout the city that help first time visitors find their way to Japantown. Several San Francisco neighborhoods and visitor destinations have well-developed programs of this type including Chinatown, North Beach, Fisherman's Wharf, and Union Square. Sponsored by the SF Visitors and Convention Bureau and the Department of Parking and Traffic, in partnership with the local neighborhood business associations, these programs provide a first glimpse of district identity outside the actual neighborhood itself. While the program may not be necessary for the regional Japanese American community that already knows of Japantown, it can be one important component of an overall visitor attraction strategy.

Such a program exists but is underdeveloped in Japantown. Currently, wayfinding and signage leading to Japantown is very limited. Unlike Chinatown and North Beach, with directional signage located at great distances out into the city and on major approach routes, most Japantown directional signage is only located within a few blocks of Japantown, at locations such as Geary and Steiner. Exhibit 22 illustrates a concept for an expanded citywide image-enhancing signage and wayfinding program for Japantown. Key strategies include:

- Establish a unique signage icon that expresses the image of Japantown. Currently, the icon that is used for the Japantown program prominently features the Peace Pagoda on a blue background. As a first stage, the community, organized through the Plan implementation Organization described in Section IV, should confirm that the icon is appropriate as the image the community seeks to project. If not, a new icon should be developed that relates to the overall image development program for Japantown.
- Locate signage at intersections of major arterials and destinations throughout the city, such as Lombard/Fillmore, Market/Geary, Union Square, and Van Ness/Geary to guide visitors to the *vicinity* of Japantown.
- Also locate signage at major junctions of Japantown Core Access Corridors that *lead directly* to the Japantown Core. These include Post, Sutter, Buchanan and Webster Streets.

This signage and wayfinding strategy complements the Urban Framework concepts discussed previously in Section III, and reinforces Primary Access Corridors and Gateway Streets that lead directly to the Japantown Core.

In addition to the signage and wayfinding program for Japantown, special consideration should be given to the streetscape character of the Japantown Core Access Corridors as they approach Japantown. These streets should have a unified landscape expression, which links the surrounding residential neighborhoods to the commercial core, and should include street tree planting and lighting. Buchanan Street as it approaches from the north and south is a particularly important visual corridor; from several blocks away, the Peace Pagoda is visible as an important feature in the cityscape. Like other important civic monuments, efforts should be made to protect and enhance view corridors to the Peace Pagoda through the design of streetscape improvements.

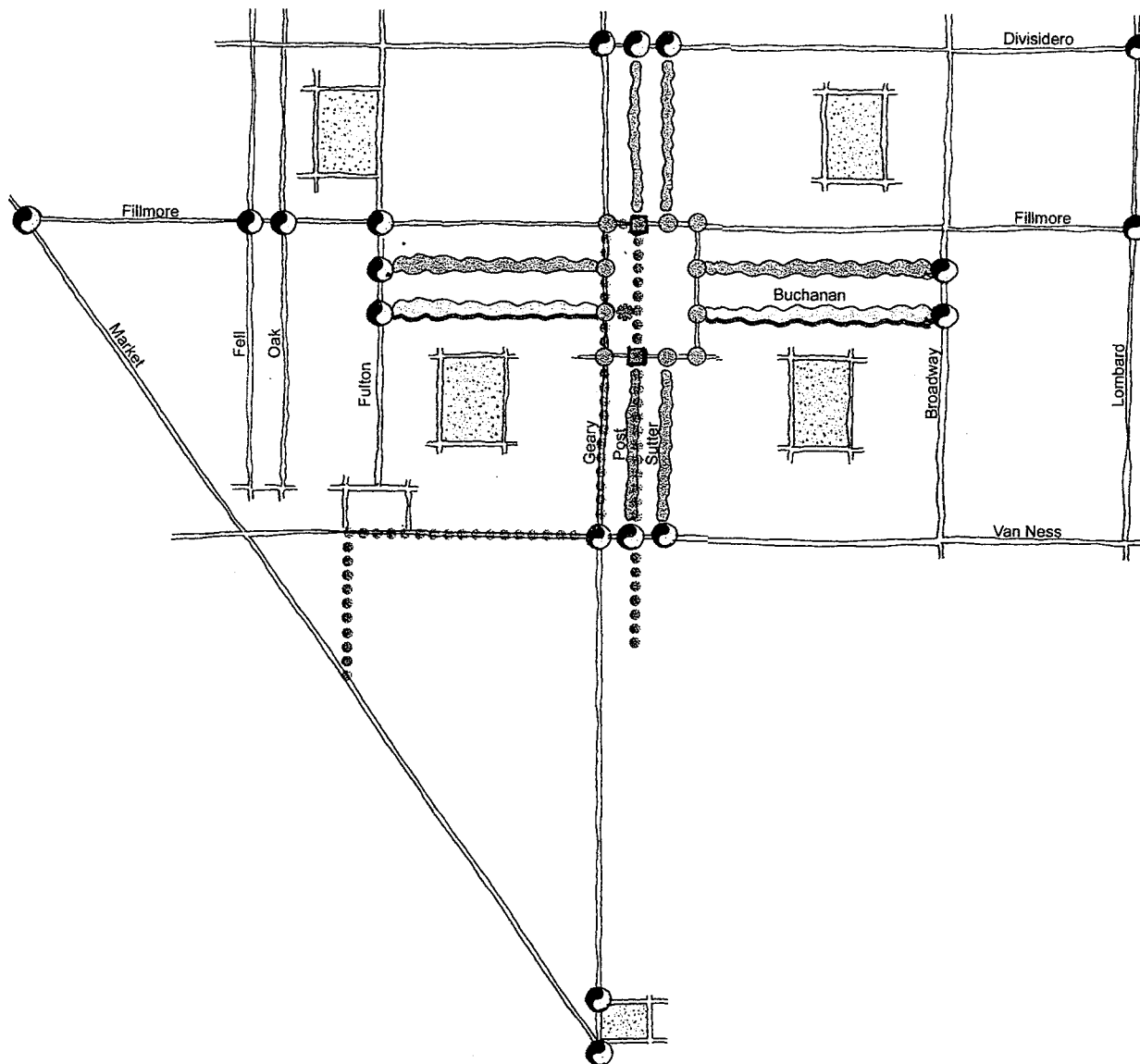


Exhibit 22

Regional Image:
City-Wide Awareness, Wayfinding
and Arrival

Task Force Objective 2.1

Strengthen tourist activity within Japantown.








Task Force Objective 2.2

Coordinate with local merchants' association to develop and implement a marketing plan to promote Japantown locally, regionally, and nationally.

Task Force Objective 4.1

Develop a cohesive urban design vision for Japantown by highlighting its center and better defining its edges to make it welcoming and visually unique to its surroundings.

Legend

-  Japantown Wayfinding/ Directional Signs
-  Gateway to the Commercial Core
-  Minor Gateway to the Japantown Core District
-  Peace Pagoda
-  Japantown Special Access Corridors
-  Japantown Core Access Corridors
-  49 Mile Scenic Drive (Existing)



Local Sense of Place: Design Character

On arrival in Japantown, the physical image and sense-of-place also must be strengthened to provide an identity that reflects the cultural, educational, recreational, entertainment and goods and services that the area has to offer. Japantown is unique in having this cross-section of features that characterize the community; establishing a physical image to express this diversity will also support the health and economic development of the community.

Exhibit 8 describes key elements of a proposed urban framework for the core of Japantown. Conceptual locations and a hierarchy of gateways, streetscape, and other elements are shown. However, what is the appropriate physical character or image of these gateways, streetscape and overall physical environment?

During the course of this phase of the community planning process, discussions were held between the consultant team and the Task Force and with the Task Force Environmental Subcommittee, as well as with the larger community at two neighborhood “town hall” forums. The purpose of these sessions was to discuss preferences regarding the nature of design expression that would provide an appropriate image and sense of place for Japantown. Potential alternative design expressions that were discussed included:

1. **Traditional Japanese.** Most clearly expressed in the historic buildings and gardens of Japan, generally prior to the Meiji era. The Japanese Tea Garden of Golden Gate Park and the Hakone Gardens in Saratoga are local examples. In Japantown, the exterior of the building that houses the Japanese Community and Cultural Center of Northern California (JCCCNC) is highly derivative of this design tradition. Traditional design expression is not, however, limited to direct copies of historic designs. Contemporary design derived from the traditional aesthetic also falls into this category. The gardens of Isamu Noguchi and the designs of Ruth Asawa in the Buchanan Mall are examples. Such designs are highly expressive of the traditional Japanese design aesthetic, albeit with a more contemporary use of materials, forms and surfaces.
2. **Contemporary Japanese/Modernist.** In many ways it is difficult to distinguish contemporary Japanese building and landscape design from that found throughout the United States and other industrialized nations. Since World War II international design has followed the principles of Modernism or other subsequent trends. The best Japanese examples are the work of architects such as Fumihiko Maki who designed the Center for the Arts in Yerba Buena Gardens. The Japan Center and Miyako Hotel are also generally designed in this contemporary modernist style. However, because such work is so closely related to international trends, it is difficult for most individuals to perceive it as providing an image to an area that is unique from many other areas in the city.
3. **Eclectic.** Japanese traditional combined with western. This image would include a mix of Japanese traditional design and western elements. Architecture of the Meiji Era in Japan sometimes achieved this mix successfully. However, while such a mix can be interesting from a design perspective, it is difficult to establish a clear image.

Concept Recommendations

The general consensus and conclusion from the various community discussions was that the physical environment of the Japantown core should seek to express the traditional Japanese design aesthetic described in number 1 above. Such an expressions provides the greatest likelihood of success in giving Japantown a unique and memorable image. However, this does not simply mean that strict reproduction of historic Japanese themes in Japanese landscape and architecture is appropriate for Japantown. Design expression can be both traditional and contemporary but should derive from an underlying traditional Japanese design aesthetic. The intent of this expression is to establish Japantown as a special place in the city of San Francisco that is reflective of, and derives from, its roots in Japanese and Japanese American culture.

This will give Japantown a unique sense of place as:

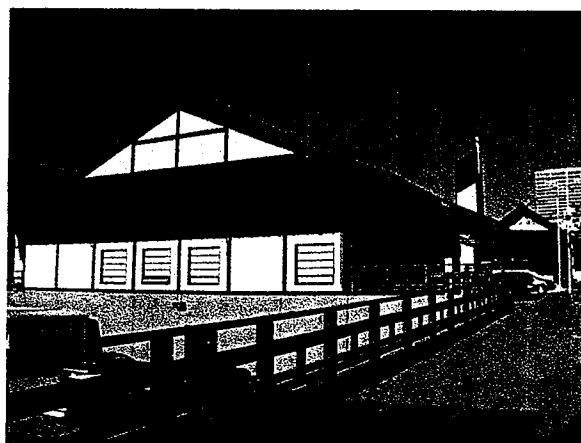
- A home for Japanese American cultural and educational institutions.
- A place to rekindle spiritual connections for the broader Japanese American community
- A unique experience for citywide residents and tourists.

Exhibit 23 illustrates examples, some from Japantown, of the kind of character both highly traditional and contemporary that might establish the image of Japantown.

Appendix B shows rough cost estimates for repairing and replacing specialty Japanese-element design features of the street/sidewalk surface of Buchanan Mall.



Exhibit 23
Character Images



The Gardens of Japantown

One of the best and least costly opportunities to improve the image of Japantown and create a people-friendly environment lies in upgrading the spaces, large and small, enclosed and open, that lie between buildings. These include spaces of all shapes and sizes including streets, courtyards, building entries, parking areas, and large interior spaces such as atriums and lobbies. Throughout Japantown today, these spaces are an ill-defined and uncared-for mix that actually degrades the image of Japantown rather than enhancing it.

These spaces present the opportunity to develop a network of gardens that will create a more hospitable neighborhood unlike any other in the city. The “gardens of Japantown” would be a system of open spaces designed to convey an expression of traditional and contemporary Japanese garden design and an image for Japantown that is beautiful and absolutely unique within the city.

Exhibit 24 illustrates potential major open space opportunities for development of a system of gardens. Although not all the parcels indicated on Exhibit 24 would be required to successfully create the Gardens of Japantown, even small plantings in the network would change the hardscape image of Japantown.

Japantown currently contains many fine landscape and garden examples, which can serve as models of design which could be applied in other areas and expanded upon, including:

- Buchanan Mall
- Nichi Bei Kai entry garden on Sutter Street
- Miyako Hotel entry parking area
- Miyako Hotel courtyard gardens
- Front garden at 1825 Sutter Street
- Kabuki Hot Springs entry garden.

Examples of potential opportunity areas and the character of gardens that could be created are illustrated in the photographs in Exhibit 25.

Implementation of an overall framework of gardens and open spaces in Japantown can be one of the fastest and most cost effective methods of improving the overall image of Japantown because:

1. It is cost effective. Landscape improvements are generally less expensive than building renovation programs.

2. Costs can be shared by the public and private sectors. Small, appropriately designed entry gardens can be installed and maintained by business owners and residents. Larger spaces can be implemented as a partnership between the Community Plan Implementation Organization and public agencies.
3. Maintenance can also be shared between business and residential property owners, the Community Plan Implementation Organization, and public agencies.

Concept Recommendations:

- The potential for reconfiguration and redesign of areas which are currently underutilized or unattractive. Potential sites include the existing Nihonmachi Parking Corporation parking lots, space gained through the narrowing of the Webster Street roadway, interior areas of Golden Gate Apartments, and the interior atriums of the Japan Center. On parking lot sites, garden development could be achieved as a community benefit that would be part of redevelopment of these sites with buildings, parking, community open space, and gardens.
- A linked system of open spaces and paths, which, when combined with streetscape improvements, will create a pathway similar to the Philosophers Walk in Kyoto, and which could become the Japantown Garden Tour. This pathway could also include interpretive and historic exhibits and ultimately become a nationally recognized resource, similar to the Japanese American National Museum, plaza and garden in Los Angeles.
- A variety of design expression, including hardscape (paving and stone similar to the Buchanan Mall) and soft naturalistic spaces.
- Design elements would include traditional expression of garden design featuring Japanese plant materials, paving materials, stone, water, and other elements.
- A variety of spaces, large and small.
- Linked to the gardens can be space for Ikebana exhibits.
- The gardens and open spaces can serve as a backdrop and location for facilities desired by the community such as museums, children's play areas, and community meeting facilities.
- Design of garden features such as paving, tiles, sculptural elements and interpretive exhibits can be prepared and installed by community based organizations including school art programs and the National Japanese American Historical Society. Japanese American artists in San Francisco and elsewhere can also be involved in the design of permanent or temporary installations.

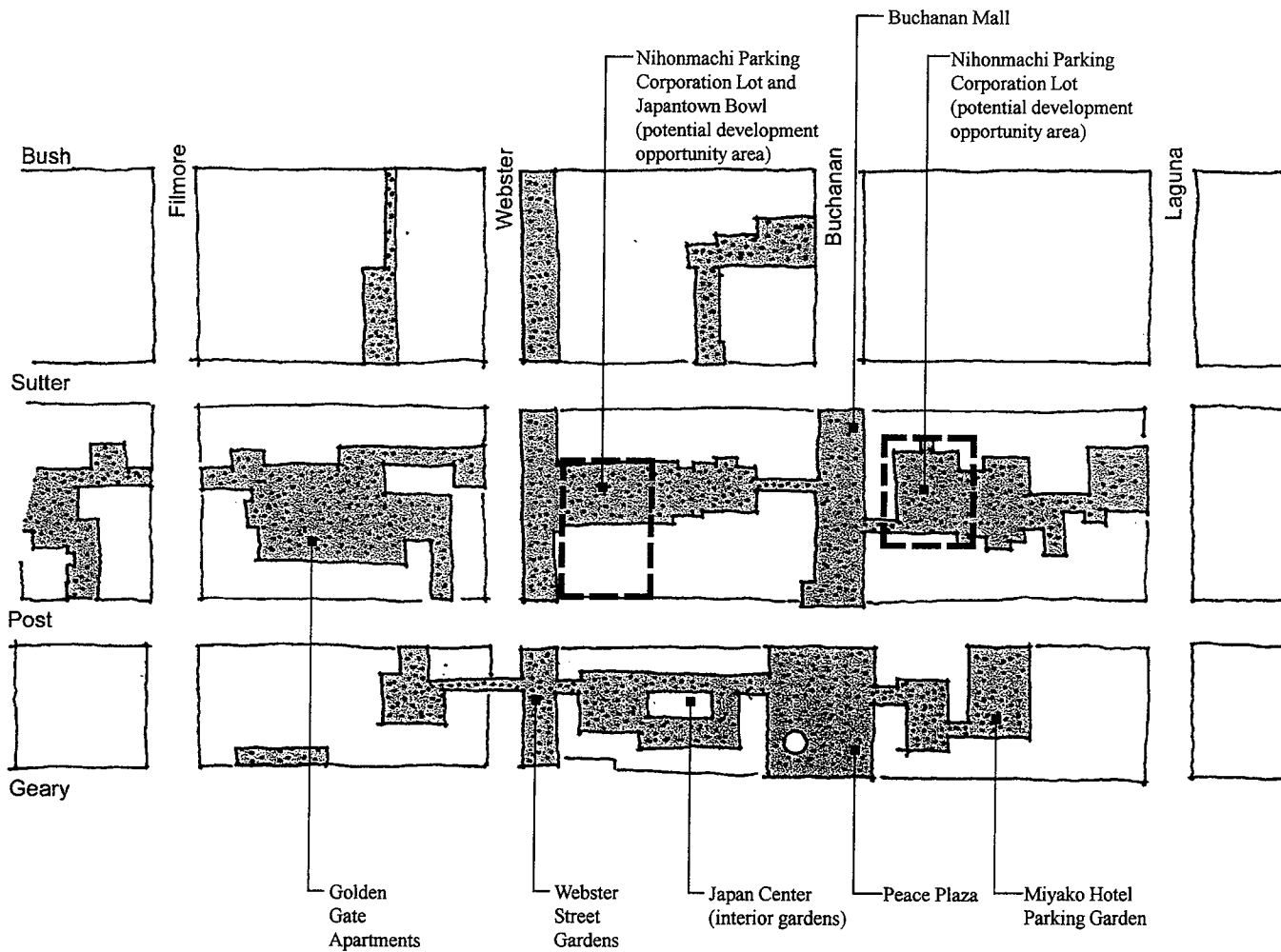


Exhibit 24

Open Space Opportunities: The Gardens of Japantown

Legend



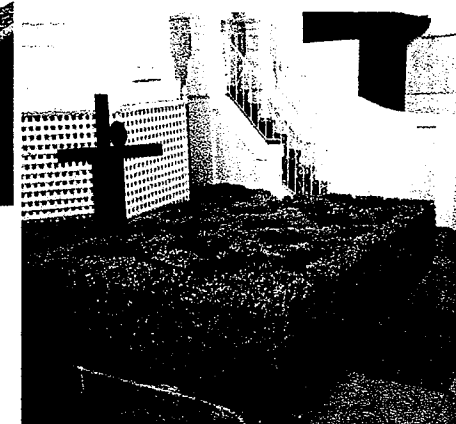
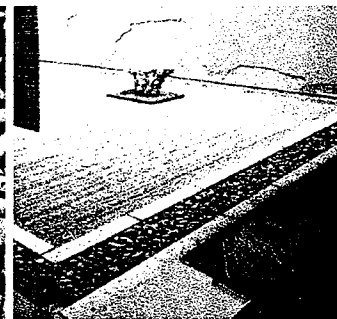
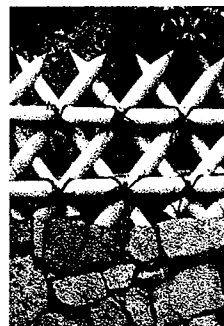
-  Major Garden and Open Space Opportunity Areas
-  Key Redevelopment Opportunity Sites (see Priority Program #3 in Section IV)



Exhibit 25



Garden Opportunities



Garden Examples

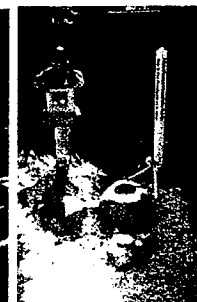
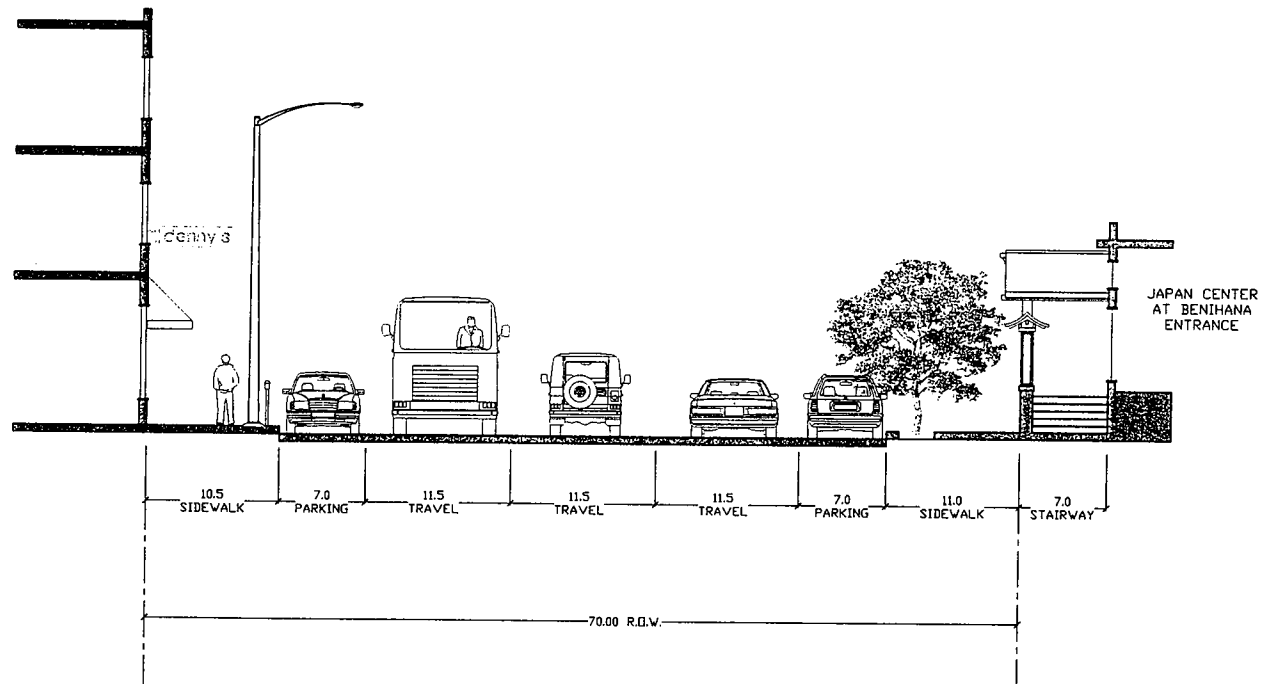


Exhibit 26

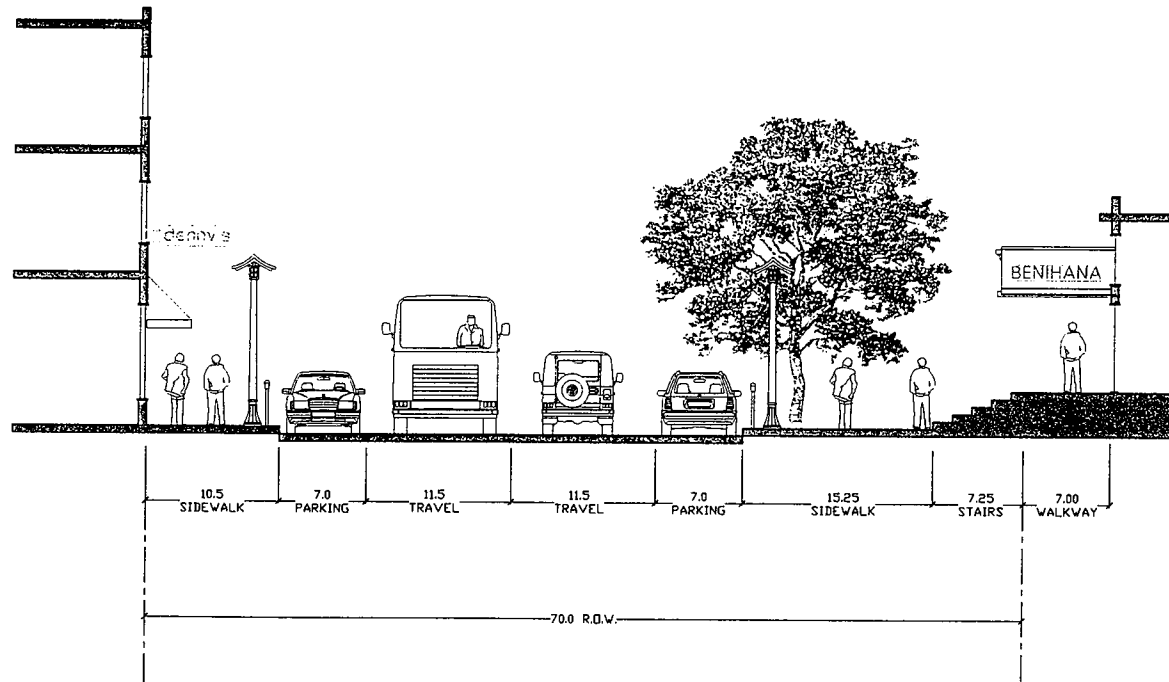


EXISTING CONDITIONS:
POST STREET BETWEEN WEBSTER AND BUCHANAN
JAPANTOWN



BMS DESIGN GROUP

Exhibit 27



POST STREET BETWEEN WEBSTER AND BUCHANAN
JAPANTOWN



BMS DESIGN GROUP

Streetscape Improvements: Post Street between Fillmore and Laguna

San Francisco, California

Conceptual Cost Estimate (excludes construction of street and relocation of underground utilities)

Item	quantity	unit	unit cost	total	notes
Street Furnishings					
Bollards	12	EA	750.00	\$9,000	12 at mall crossing
Benches	6	EA	1500.00	\$9,000	2 per block
Bike racks	18	EA	750.00	\$13,500	3 per block face
Trash receptacles	12	EA	850.00	\$10,200	1 per corner
Newspaper racks	6	EA	500.00	\$3,000	2 per block
<i>total</i>				\$44,700	
Planting					
36" Box tree - Street tree	90	EA	1500.00	\$135,000	30 per block
Custom Cast iron tree grates	90	EA	600.00	\$54,000	
Custom Steel tree guards	90	EA	600.00	\$54,000	
<i>total</i>				\$243,000	
Lighting					
Pedestrian light	48	EA	7000.00	\$336,000	16 per block
<i>total</i>			7000.00	\$336,000	
Sidewalks					
Curb and gutter	3000	LF	20.00	\$60,000	
Special paving	40000	SF	20.00	\$800,000	
Steps	1750	LF	100.00	\$175,000	
<i>total</i>				\$1,035,000	
Gateway Features					
Fillmore Street	1	LS	100000.00	\$100,000	
Laguna Street	1	LS	100000.00	\$100,000	
				\$200,000	
Subtotal				\$1,858,700	
Contingency			35%	\$650,545	
Professional fees				\$350,000	
Construction Management			10%	\$250,925	
Total				\$3,110,170	

Excludes:
Construction of street
Relocation of underground utilities

Prepared by:
BMS Design Group
8/23/01

APPENDIX B

Renovation Estimates for Buchanan Mall Street Surface (supplied by Nihonmachi Parking Corporation)*

Areas in need of replacement/renovation:

Reconstructing the sidewalk bordering fountain
cobblestones and property fronts; walkways from
Buchanan Mall to east (Buchanan to Laguna)
and west parking lots (Buchanan to Webster)

\$140,000

Removal of three areas of cobblestone paving
(cobblestone “river”) and installation of sand-blasted
cobblestone in the same three areas

\$171,000

Estimated Total

\$311,000

* Nihonmachi Parking Corporation is contractually bound by the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency to maintain conditions on the Buchanan Mall, which is a city-owned street. NPC receives revenues for this purpose from operating the outdoor parking lots adjacent to Buchanan Mall.